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AMERICAN QUESTIONS

MICHAEL WALZER
What's Going On?

HAROLD MEYERSON
What Hope for Liberalism?

MICHAEL KAZIN
Are Third Parties Realistic?

DAVID MOBERG
Can Labor Change?

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Does the Left Fear the People?

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Giving Business the Business?

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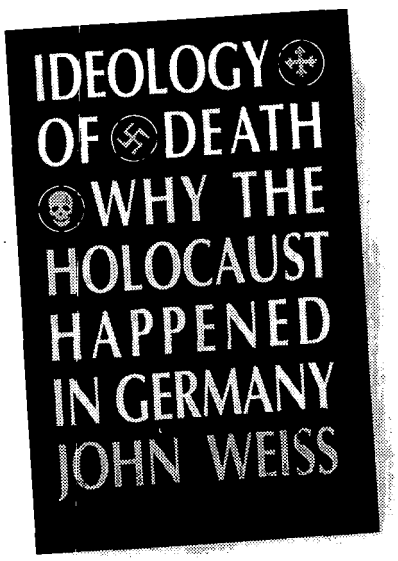

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Winter 1996

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Editor's Page

In this issue of *Dissent* you will find, for the first time in an American publication, George Orwell's original preface to *Animal Farm*. This essay, a product of Orwell's difficulties in getting his anti-Stalinist novella into print, offers an axiom: tell people "what they don't want to hear."

Dissent thinks this is a good idea, especially in American affairs and those of the left. In our "American Questions" and "Arguments" sections, some of the American left's most thoughtful commentators address this difficult hour—one in which Republicans dominate, Bill Clinton "triangulates," Democrats are in disarray, and what's left of the left is encouraged by change in the AFL-CIO while agitated about the so-called "Million Man March."

This is also a time to repeat loudly what the Israeli right and its American friends don't want people to hear. Yitzhak Rabin's murder by a right-wing religious zealot throws into sharp relief long-standing differences between Zionism's left and right. For Israel's social democratic founders, land was not a fetish, but a means to reconstruct a people. So too for Rabin, a security-minded man who reinvented his politics when new political options opened. One reason he could extend his hand to the Palestinians was that he knew something about Israeli military strength, unlike his critics, say, in Brooklyn. Moreover, the Labor-led government, like Peace Now, grasped that endless occupation of the West Bank and Gaza would spell disaster for both Israelis and Palestinians. (*Dissent*'s Spring issue will carry Peace Now's Jonathan Frankel on Israeli developments.)

The Israeli right, secular and religious, seeks to confuse its nationalist fundamentalism with national security. Ask Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu: will you trade territory if it can be assured that no violence will again originate from the land you leave? Such a guarantee, he'd probably retort, is impossible (which is true). But then pose the question just as a thought experiment. If he doesn't dodge it, he must answer "no," he'd yield nothing; Likud's real bottom line is "historical rights" to land, not security.

Although Likud follows the rules of Israeli democracy and shouldn't be conflated with antiparliamentary forces, it cannot escape blame for an atmosphere of violence. Religious rightists educated the killer, but Likud's pre-assassination rhetoric was ferocious and demagogic; Netanyahu branded Rabin "personally responsible" for Israeli deaths in Arab terror attacks and showed few misgivings when zealots mobilized against the peace process.

Since American conservatives have few qualms about dancing with right-wing extremism, particularly the religious variety, it is not surprising that the *Weekly Standard*, the new organ of Washington's "mini-cons," features apologetics for the Israeli right. (Mark Levinson scrutinizes the *Standard*'s treatment of American affairs in this *Dissent*.) After Rabin's slaying, one Yoram Hazony, distorting history with *Pravda*-like aplomb, portrayed Israel's right as an innocent, long-suffering victim of leftist violence. Ruth Wisse explained how Rabin brought "unprecedented political and moral confusion" to Israel. If Israel's government is for "strategic surrender" of land, it should say it—so opined, feverishly, this general of Yiddish literature at Harvard.

But Labor always advocated territorial compromise. Indeed, when Rabin was premier in the 1970s he stated frankly that he was willing to visit Hebron with a passport, *given the right conditions*. "Political and moral confusion" comes from nationalist fundamentalists who speak of "strategy" when they really oppose territorial compromise under any conditions. And now they call for "unity" among Israelis and Jews when what they really want is a moral escape hatch from their own complicity in political extremism. The hatch should be shut and the peace process pursued with vigor.

—M.C. □

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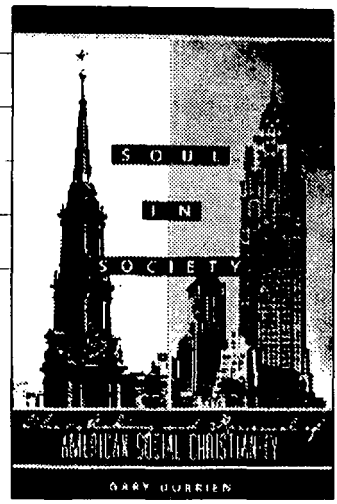
"Gary Dorrien brilliantly mines the renewable moral energies of the Jewish and Christian traditions. This is prophecy for our times."

— DANIEL C. MAGUIRE



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— **WILLIAM BIRMINGHAM,**
Cross Currents

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American Questions

Michael Walzer

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Notes on the Right Turn

The story that I want to tell about the new American right begins with the takeover of the Republican party by Barry Goldwater and his friends in 1964. Think of that as a dress rehearsal—though we thought it real enough at the time—for disciplined, ideological, right-wing politics. It wasn't a campaign, many of us said, but a *movement*. Richard Hofstadter offered this analysis in the British journal *Encounter*:

> The Goldwater movement is a revolt against the whole modern condition as the old-fashioned American sees it—against the world of organisation and bureaucracy, the welfare state, our urban disorders, secularism, the decline of American entrepreneurial bravura, the apparent disappearance of individualism and individuality, and the emergence of unwelcome international burdens. Although its enthusiasts like to think of themselves as conservatives, their basic feeling is a hatred of what America has become. . . .

This sounds very much like a description of the contemporary right, but Hofstadter was firmly convinced in 1964 that there would be no contemporary right, at least of this kind, thirty years later. For the Goldwater movement represented, he thought, an American version of the traditionalist revolt, a politics of nostalgia, a WASP backlash (like Prohibition and anti-immigrant protest), that had no future in an increasingly modern, secular, liberal, and pluralist America. Arguing in a similar vein, also in *Encounter*, Seymour Martin Lipset wrote the right's epitaph:

> It cannot be stressed too strongly that the politics of backlash, whether religious-cultural, economic, or racially motivated, is a consequence of the fact that the U.S. is becoming more liberal. The groups now reacting with such desperation are desperate precisely because they are growing less influential and less numerous.

At *Dissent* we did not accept the easy optimism of this analysis. Irving Howe wrote a critique in the Fall 1964 issue of the magazine, and I wrote a similar piece in the British journal *Views* (I was living in London that year, where the *Encounter* articles were much discussed). We thought that Goldwater was a harbinger of worse to come—for two reasons. First, the right-wing reaction that Hofstadter and Lipset described had barely begun. Backlash politics lay somewhere ahead of us, because the social and cultural realities against which it was directed were still emergent. Modern, secular, liberal, and pluralist America was only half real, half fantasy. And, second, the strength of the right was radically underestimated if one focused too closely and exclusively upon the traditional WASP world of local businessmen, small-town doctors, lawyers, realtors, and insurance salesmen, retired army officers, Methodist and Baptist churchgoers, and so on. The Goldwater right did not yet have the support of corporate America, but new wealth and entrepreneurial energy, especially Southern and Southwestern wealth and energy, were already engaged: this was a modern as well as a traditionalist politics, a politics of interest as well as (and for the moment, even more than) of resentment. The Goldwater right, Howe wrote, "rests. . . on the social selfishness of large segments of the upper middle class, which consciously disdain the sentiments of 'welfarism' and are prepared to let the poor and the ethnic minorities stew in silence."

These two critical arguments are of differ-

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ent sorts; the first focuses on social and cultural factors, the second largely, though not entirely, on economic factors. They suggest different causal explanations of right-wing politics. The two explanations are still relevant and still useful, and I want to restate each of them—without, however, attempting a systematic comparison or any measurement of their relative importance. No doubt, the different factors interact, in ways I can't precisely describe; they also point to possible lines of strain in the contemporary right.

The first reason for our skepticism about the "traditionalist revolt" was the sense that the social transformations against which the Goldwater movement was directed were only just beginning. White backlash was not a major political force in 1964, I argued, "chiefly because the civil rights movement has not yet made sufficient progress to threaten anyone." But there has been real progress since, in many different areas of American life, much of it experienced as threatening by many Americans. And in the last decade and a half we have clearly, finally, seen backlash politics on a large scale. But the backlash can't be explained, as Lipset tried to explain it, by saying that its partisans are growing less influential and less numerous, that modernization is an inexorable process and traditionalist revolt a lost cause, a politics of desperation and certain defeat. It looks more, right now, like a politics of ideological confidence and militant ambition.

Still, right-wing politics is in part at least reactive, and what it reacts to is left-wing success or what is thought of as left-wing success. It's best to be clear about the character of this success, since most leftists refuse any acknowledgment of it and then have no sense of how their political opponents see the world. So here is a rough list of successes, in no particular order—as of the 1980s, say, though the rollback in some areas had already begun by then and is considerably advanced by now.

(1) The visible impact of the civil rights movement: the new black middle class, the growing number of black elected officials and civil servants, the attention given to black protest in the media, local as well as national.

(2) The visible impact of feminism: the growing number of women in the professions and the political class, their increased mobility and growing presence in middle-, and occasionally upper-level, management positions, and media attention to all this.

(3) The effects of affirmative action, probably somewhat exaggerated in the claim made by some supporters: that eleven million women and blacks and other minorities now hold jobs that they would otherwise not hold.

(4) The emergence of gay rights politics and, again, the attention paid to it in the media.

(5) The acceptance of cultural pluralism, if not of a full-scale ideological multi-culturalism, in government agencies, schools, universities, and the media.

(6) The transformation of family life: the first successful challenges to male authority and the traditional division of labor, first steps toward protecting battered wives and rescuing abused children, rising divorce rates, changing sexual mores, new household arrangments—and, again, the portrayal of all this in the media.

(7) The progress of secularization: the fading of religion in general and Christianity in particular from the public sphere—classrooms, textbooks, legal codes, holidays, and so on.

(8) The virtual abolition of capital punishment.

(9) The legalization of abortion.

(10) The extension and increasingly effective enforcement of environmental, safety, and public health regulations—most dramatically exemplified in the campaign against smoking.

(11) The first successes in the effort to regulate and limit the private ownership of guns.

(12) The constraint of police powers and the enlargement of the rights of criminal suspects and prisoners.

(13) The steady expansion of Medicare and Medicaid and, more generally, the rising expenditure of public funds for welfare provision—and also the growing accessibility of this provision to such people as amnestied and even illegal immigrants.

Most of these victories were won in the courts, the media, the schools, the civil service—and not in the central arenas of democratic poli-

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tics. They reflect the leftism or liberalism of lawyers, judges, federal bureaucrats, professors, school teachers, social workers, journalists, television and screen writers—not the population at large. Those liberal "elites" no doubt had support in the population at large; they responded to demands from organized groups of various sorts; but they were not driven to act by the pressure of a mass movement or a majoritarian party. Nonetheless, as anyone who was politically conscious in the 1950s or early 1960s will recognize, the policies they put into effect changed the "feel" of American life. The left didn't "seize power" in the years after 1964. It didn't build stable or lasting movements or create coherent constituencies, let alone control Congress or the presidency. But there is a sense in which the left or some vulgarized version of the left dominated the culture (and parts of the legal system and the civil service) and even seemed at times to be winning the Gramscian war of position.

But this was largely an illusion, because so many Americans experienced this "left" culture (and law and administration) as something alien, frightening, or deeply disturbing. Of course, the developing reaction was (and is) well financed and, at least to some degree, carefully orchestrated in the very media that the left was (and is) said to control. But it would never have taken on its current dimensions if it didn't tap into genuine, widespread popular anger and fear. And this isn't just WASP anger and fear. Backlash politics now has a much larger social base than Hofstadter and Lipset perceived in 1964, for it appeals also to Catholics and to white ethnic groups, especially to men in those groups, but to many women as well: the so-called Reagan Democrats, who show little sign of coming "home."

What are these people so angry about, so afraid of? It's not always easy to say, and the dominant materialist ideologies of the old left capture only part of the story, which is cultural as well as material. They believe that the world they partly lived in and partly imagine they lived in—of stable families, secure jobs, safe neighborhoods, familiar religious truths, established gender and racial hierarchies—is collapsing around them, and that the victories of the left have caused the collapse. With regard to the list I have just given, they are not entirely wrong on either count. Even on the left, there is little sense of these successes as parts of a coherent program and very little speculation about what sort of society their completion would bring: how would it be held together? Would it be stable? What would everyday life be like within it? The focus of left and liberal politics these last thirty years has been overwhelmingly on "liberation" from various restrictive institutions and practices—not on the creation of new institutions and practices.

But these leftist successes can't by themselves explain the widespread sense of social collapse. For any plausible explanation, we would have to add to the list economic decline, decaying cities, broken families, homelessness, drug use, and (real and "virtual") violence. And about all that the left has its own story to tell, in which the free market and the profit motive figure in a large way—for there are no more revolutionary and disruptive forces in the modern world. (Cf. *The Communist Manifesto*: "Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.") But the market has invisible hands, whereas "liberal bureaucrats" and "leftist lawyers" leave fingerprints.

Right-wing anger is more specifically directed against the supposed, and to some extent real, beneficiaries of those supposed, and to some extent real, leftist victories: blacks, women in the professions and the civil service, gays, immigrants, people on welfare—and then against the politicians and bureaucrats who administer the benefits, who work "for them" and not "for us." Of course, this anger would be less intense and politically less effective, though by no means nonexistent, in better economic conditions. On the other hand, the economy-as-it-is might well generate something closer to a left politics were it not for the cultural backlash. The ferocity of the fights over abortion, gun control, capital punishment, "political correctness," and even affirmative action (where, admittedly, jobs are at stake) can't be accounted for in narrowly economic terms. If rational explanations can only be made in the language of material interests,

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then these conflicts will largely defy explanation. They are focused more on ways of life than on standards of living. That's why the right is able to present itself as idealistic these days, and why it is in fact so militantly ideological.

Consider the ideology: its protagonists claim to be defending traditional American values, and to some extent they are doing just that, though in a very one-sided way, suppressing the fraternal impulses of the tradition and its more open-ended, imaginative, and utopian features. Their hero is a man (though it is one of the signs of the right's modernity that its politically active women, while officially encouraged to be the helpmates of this man, also aspire to be his equals) who is strong, self-sufficient, armed if necessary, like "the pioneers who made this country what it is." He works hard, seizes opportunities, accepts responsibilities, takes the lead (and expects to be followed by his wife and children). He is the head of his family, a good neighbor (though his conception of the neighborhood is narrow), a churchgoer, a fervent patriot, a citizen wary of the tyranny of public officials, a soldier defending his country.

This is, again, a version of an old American ideal; its everyday exemplars can be made fun of, gently, in the popular culture, but left-wing intellectuals and writers who attempt anything more savage are likely to find that the public, like Queen Victoria, is not amused. In any case, savage criticism, though an understandable response to the self-satisfaction of this hero or, rather, of his admirers and imitators, is probably misplaced. The left too includes people of roughly this description (and once included many more of them); they make up much of its own rank-and-file: the always dependable, dues-paying, ready-for-action militants of its movements, unions, and political parties. (And it is sad but true that men and women on welfare, who don't fit this image and therefore are despised by the right, don't make good leftists either: for readily understandable reasons, they are hard to organize and, since the decline of urban political machines, they don't vote.)

But something is missing in the standard contemporary portrait of this American hero, and this absence helps to account for his readier presence on the right than on the left: he has no sense of, or he is ideologically barred from acknowledging, his own and other people's vulnerability. And so there is no basis in his character for compassion and solidarity. He cooperates with others only for some limited and specific purpose. Typically, he has partners but not comrades; outside his family, he is, mostly, a loner. And he resents people who encroach on his space, ask for his help, make some claim on his resources, inhibit his private pursuit of happiness. Even relatives may be resented, but strangers and foreigners are resented more easily, with greater peace of mind. And, again, politicians and bureaucrats who represent the interests of these importunate others are resented along with them. "Don't tread on me."

What most surprises my friends on the left, I think, is the radical anti-authoritarianism and antistatism of the new right. Obviously, this defense of liberty sits uneasily with the growing investment in prisons, with anti-abortion politics, with arguments for capital punishment, school prayer, the censorship of pornography, and much else on the Christian evangelical agenda. Still, the identification of the state and the left, of top-down reform with "liberal" political, professional, and intellectual elites, isn't crazy. We have been misled into thinking that we were the real anti-statists by our opposition to the Vietnam War, the imperial presidency, governmental deception, witch-hunting, censorship, police brutality, and so on, and by our arguments for decentralization, politics on a human scale, popular participation at the local level. In fact, however, since the New Deal (more accurately, perhaps, as right-wing publicists claim, since the income tax), the state has been the absolutely crucial agency of liberal and left social policy. Economic redistribution, welfare provision, racial integration, environmental control, safety regulation: all these are unimaginable without state power. So the right delights in opposing this power, striking postures of militancy and defiance, while leftists and liberals struggle to explain to their fellow citizens why government officials enforcing gun control, say, aren't fascist beasts.

Resentment makes for an ugly politics. When

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it is focused on the rich and the well-born, it produces a bad egalitarianism, a politics of envy and leveling. The left is often accused of sponsoring a politics of this sort, and sometimes does. Think, for example, of the French terror, when aristocrats (or people called aristocrats or associated with them) were ceremoniously beheaded while the Parisian crowds cheered. Or think of the denial of educational and employment opportunities to "bourgeois" children in many communist countries. Today, neither the American aristocracy nor the bourgeoisie is in any danger. Resentment is focused, instead, on the poor, on racial minorities, on new immigrants—and on the state officials who (usually inadequately) serve and protect these people. And it produces instead a bad libertarianism, a politics of selfishness and neglect. There are, as yet, no public spectacles like those of 1793, but when people are thrown off the welfare rolls, one can almost hear the cheering crowds.

Still, it would be a mistake to try to understand the contemporary right solely in terms of resentment, traditionalist revolt, backlash politics. Arguments of this sort give too much credence to its populist rhetoric and its gestures of defiance. This was the second reason for our skepticism in 1964: we thought that right-wing politics was not only reactive but also adaptive to the emerging conditions of American political, social, and above all economic life. Even more clearly today, it has to be analyzed as an effort to seize upon real opportunities and avoid real dangers—not merely to strike out irrationally at scapegoats and victims or to reject a radically misunderstood "liberalism."

The visible successes of the liberal left, as I have already argued, give a false impression of its strength, for they were won without the support of large-scale, mobilized social movements. Institutionally, the left today is weaker than it has been in a long time. The decline of the unions and the incoherence and spiritlessness of the Democratic party are the visible signs of this weakness, but it is also important that the "new social movements" have not replaced those two. They have not created armies of activists or disciplined voting blocs. The electoral "gender gap" is too small to offset the drastic shift of white men to the right. Environmentalist politics draws strong support in opinion polls but hasn't yet proven effective in either congressional or presidential elections. Why is this so? Now it is important to stress the other side of the dichotomy that I set up earlier: the reasons for this are material as well as cultural. The globalizing economy, disappearing factories, downsizing companies, and capital mobility all work to produce a sense, which is not at all unrealistic, that it's not only a way of life that is at risk but also a way of earning a living. This makes for a different sort of desperation than that described by Hofstadter and Lipset in 1964, which leaves much less room for optimism—and much less room for left politics in either its standard or alternative versions.

Political and economic weakness on the left has a twofold effect. It opens opportunities to the rich and powerful that were mostly not available in the sixties: hence the readiness of corporate executives to support a far right politics that they disdained only thirty years ago. They now have a chance to free themselves from governmental restraints, tax burdens, safety and environmental regulations, legal liabilities, and union contracts, and so to increase their share of the GNP—and all this in the name of liberty! The growing inequalities of American economic life are a direct reflection of this newfound freedom, which is in fact the privilege of the few.

For the many, on the other hand, the left's weakness makes any collective resistance to these inequalities enormously difficult. The material conditions of everyday life—declining living standards, the threat of unemployment (or, more likely, underemployment: work that doesn't use one's skill or fill one's time, that provides poor wages and no benefits), the disorders of our cities, and the steady deterioration of the public sphere—do not at this moment provide fertile ground for leftist commitment. People are pushed toward private, rather than collective, versions of self-defense.

For obvious reasons, these are likely to be most successful among the middle and upper-middle classes, where they are manifest, for example, in the extraordinary proliferation of privately owned residential communities. Some

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twenty million people live in such communities today, behind walls policed by armed guards. They pay for the services they get and do their best to avoid paying for public services that other people get. But private self-defense has a broader social appeal. The increased interest in school vouchers, the disenchantment with the welfare system, the tax revolts and anti-immigrant protests, the growth of private security firms, and the arming of the American household—all these express the same sense of having to cope by oneself, for oneself. Evangelical Protestantism might well be similarly explained: a search for salvation that avoids the old communal structures and the old patterns of mediation and mutuality. Even the craziness of American life, always with us, I suppose, but suddenly so much more salient, is probably also a way of coping: from militia training in remote places to spiritual fulfillment through diet and exercise. (Like everyone else, I am in principle in favor of diet and exercise, but it is important to acknowledge that men and women obsessed with health food and body building are not the stuff of left politics.)

We are watching today a massive, if uncoordinated, effort by large numbers of ordinary Americans to free themselves from the costs of social solidarity, to cut loose from people in trouble, with whom they are afraid to identify, to make it on their own. I stress the word "uncoordinated"—for this effort takes different and even contradictory forms. Corporate support for NAFTA, for example, reflects an abandonment of American workers and a repudiation of the hard-won, always precarious, industrial agreeements worked out in the years after World War II (and still effective in 1964): this is the politics of interest. Pat Buchanan's demagogic opposition to NAFTA reflects a nationalism directed as much against American minorities (and new immigrants) as against foreign workers: this is the politics of resentment. It is hard to imagine these two in alliance for long, and yet they march side by side on many issues and cooperate easily in the dismantling of the welfare and regulatory state. Reaction against modern culture and adaptation to the global economy go together here, in opposition to a state perceived to be strongly engaged in helping blacks, immigrants, gays, and so on, and also against a state perceived to be strongly engaged in constraining free enterprise and entrepreneurial zeal. And when this state, under attack, deprived of funds, fails to run decent public schools, or stop factories from moving to Brazil, or hold down health care costs, or control urban violence, more and more people are forced to fend for themselves. The right then offers a strange but not entirely incoherent mix of individualist alternatives: self-reliance, local control, privatization, the free market, charismatic Christianity, New Age quackery. . . .

When I call these alternatives "adaptations," I don't mean to say that they are going to work. At the same time, however, they are not likely to fail in any immediate and obvious way. The attack on the welfare state will certainly make life harder for many people, but I suspect that this impact will be less massive and more delayed than many leftists suppose—in part because of private coping, which will be effective for a while, for some people, in part because of slack in the system and bureaucratic inertia. We should also add, I think, bureaucratic opposition and obstruction: the welfare civil service is not a Republican stronghold. The response of California educators to the abolition of affirmative action in state colleges and universities suggests one future version of left politics: a kind of inner-governmental resistance. They will find other ways, the educators said, to reproduce the current diversity of racial and ethnic groups in the student population. If this turns out to be a typical response, the Republicans are going to learn that there is a considerable gap between ideological triumph and actual victory on the ground.

That also means, however, that the various social catastrophes looming in the mind of the left—millions of men and women begging in the streets, the destruction of the black middle class and the disappearance of black students from elite universities, massive environmental pollution, a surge in industrial accidents, and so on—are probably not going to happen, at least not on the expected scale. A long, dreary, and dispiriting decline in all these areas is more likely than a dramatic crash. Republican legislators face a

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long battle with social workers, school teachers and administrators, much of the civil service that deals with product and work safety and environmental standards, scientists and technicians in and out of government, doctors and nurses. Maybe the resistance of all these groups to the right-wing agenda will be nothing more than a rearguard action, easing the general retreat of the left, and encouraging people to think that a major regrouping and counter-offensive isn't really necessary. I sense among some leftists today a certain eagerness for catastrophe, so that there won't be any doubt about the urgency of turning back the political tide. An old, bad, and dangerous idea is in the air: the worse, the better. Let the Republicans do their worst, since only then will we get a chance to do better. But I think that we should wish the inner-governmental resistance well, and join it whenever we can. A leftist counter-offensive is a long way off, and meanwhile people in trouble and at risk need to be protected.

A friendly critic of an earlier version of this article suggests another possibility: a new centrism that combines left/right politics in two different, perhaps alternating, ways. One such potential center would be liberal on economic issues while seeking to accommodate backlash politics; the other would reject the backlash while maintaining an anti-statist economic conservatism. The first of these would be run from within the Democratic party: Governor Casey of Pennsylvania suggests what it might look like. The second would be run from within the Republican party, perhaps by someone like Colin Powell. But neither of these versions of centrist politics has yet been tested nationally, and it seems likely that each would be rejected by party activists. For the moment, it is the union of cultural and economic commitments that holds the high ground, with exuberance on the right, dispiritedly on the left.

The right, right now, has seized the ideological initiative and sets the political agenda. Its ideology has the contradictory doubleness that I have been describing: nostalgia for a Norman Rockwell America, on the one hand, and a hard, angry, radically individualist survivalism, on the other. The two don't always go together, but they do somehow match the mood, and perhaps also fit the experience, of many Americans—and not, I think, primarily of Americans who live in small towns. The politics of the new right is also bred in the newer cities and burgeoning suburbs of modern America. It is a response to the "extreme strain, mobility, competition, anxiety, and disorder...of modernity itself," I wrote in 1964, "or at any rate to one of the several alternative modernities currently being shaped in the United States: a particularly raw, because very advanced, form of capitalism, unmitigated by the solidary structures of an older urbanism."

Men and women in such a setting are driven to become entrepreneurs of the self, egotists with a mission (and certain aspects of left culture have played into this intensely personal politics, sometimes identified with "liberation"). That these same people also long for an American tradition isn't all that hard to understand. But the left faces a dilemma here: it can't defend the egotism . . . or the traditionalism. Certain versions of communitarian politics represent an effort to exploit the nostalgia for tradition, to give a left twist to the longing for family, neighborhood, and church. I am not entirely unsympathetic to that sort of thing, but it doesn't speak to the needs of people living in the ruins, as it were, of communal life, facing the dangers of the modern economy. It isn't a program for survival. Of course, the right's "sink or swim in the market" is a survivalist program only for some, and this message of (self-)selection is reinforced by the ideological insistence that they swim best who swim alone, leaving their wounded behind. For the moment, however, large numbers of Americans identify with those solitary swimmers, angry in the water, but not yet ready for the left's lifeboat. (Does the left have a lifeboat? Is it seaworthy? What does it look like? Please continue to read *Dissent*.) □

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Harold Meyerson

DEMOCRATS ON DEFENSE

What Hope for Liberalism?

If the 1995 off-year election provides any portents for 1996, they are that the best the Democrats can hope for is a defensive victory. In the November elections in Virginia, Kentucky, New Jersey, and elsewhere, the Democrats did not run on a program of their own. They ran against Newt Gingrich and the fine print in his Contract, and more particularly against the proposed Republican cuts in Medicare, education, and environmental programs.

The good news is that the Democrats prevailed—and that in poll after poll, respondents reject the Republican revolution in most of its particulars, though they continue to support an assault on government waged on the level of generalities. The bad news is that American liberalism has been reduced to rebuttals, that the liberal base is both shrunken and scattered, and that the Democratic project has become little more than arresting a rightward gallop by acquiescing in a rightward drift.

Indeed, the 1995 election was the first in over sixty years in which Samuel Beer's famous formulation—that the Democrats are the sun of American politics and the Republicans the moon—had to be completely reversed. The agenda in American politics today is set by Gingrich & Company, and Democrats are defined not by their own programs but by their degree of disagreement with the Republicans: a liberal opposes the de-entitlization of welfare, a moderate favors only some cutbacks, and so on. Moreover, even if the Democrats hold the White House (a plausible prospect if Bill Clinton can be kept from making further late-night speeches or phone calls) and regain the Congress (a more remote prospect, particularly in the Senate), it is unlikely that they will be able to retake the offensive—and not only because they will have run almost entirely against Newt.

The deeper problem is that their last offensive—their own legislative agenda of 1993-1994—failed so utterly. The progressive planks of Clinton's 1992 campaign—national health insurance, universally available college loans, increased investment in education and infrastructure—were either whittled down to pilot-program size or defeated altogether. Correspondingly, the defeat of much of the Gingrich program or even of the Gingrichites themselves at the polls next November will not mean that the idea of government has been revalidated. It will not mean that the forces for a liberal resurgence have grown. Rather, it will mark the settling of American politics onto a rather grim and unstable ground zero—with the forces that would dismantle government checked by the public's support for universal programs, and the forces that would expand or enhance government checked by both the power of business and the public's ideological predilections.

It's a stalemate that's likely to benefit two political groupings. The immediate beneficiary should be the centrists clustered around the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), whose program of incremental retrenchment may well be enactable precisely because it embodies rather than challenges the great American stasis. (One of the more depressing bits of current political intelligence is that Bob Kerrey, the anti-liberal Nebraska Democrat who heads the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee, has recruited half-a-dozen center-right DLC business-types to run for the Senate in 1996.) But as the stalemate con-

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tinues, as government fails to deliver on behalf of an angry electorate whose incomes have stagnated, the longer term beneficiary may well be the nationalist right that Pat Buchanan currently heads. Buchanan will never be the nominee of the upscale, laissez-faire Republican party, but his antipathy to the state, to minorities, to liberal elites and to globe-trotting corporations could make him a distinct and potent third force in American politics—a deregionalized George Wallace, thriving not on sixties-style civil disorder but on nineties-style economic decline.

Echoes of the Jazz Age

In many ways, the nineties are the twenties come again. These are the decades that book-end the New Deal Order, and they have more in common with each other than with the decades in between. Now as then, the market is ascendant, government increasingly powerless, and politics tribalized.

Some of the most basic indices of the past sixty years no longer apply. Political scientists and political junkies, for instance, have long believed that the best predictor of a president's reelection was the direction and rate of economic growth in the spring before the election. The unstated premise here was that the benefits of growth were shared by a clear majority of Americans. Plainly, that is no longer the case. George Bush's jobless recovery has become Bill Clinton's raiseless recovery.

It remains an article of faith in the economic mainstream that the uptick in productivity that the economy is at long last experiencing will at some point translate to higher wages. That was indeed the normal course of events in post–World War II America. It was the consequence not of some immutable economic law, however, but rather of the fact that unions were winning cost-of-living adjustments, annual productivity increases, and higher wages generally. It was, in short, the consequence of a relatively high rate of unionization—and when those rates subsided to the levels of the twenties, we reverted to an earlier set of economic laws. During the twenties, as then-economist (later U.S. Senator) Paul Douglas demonstrated, productivity gains went to profits, dividends, and investments rather than wages. That is the economic reality that has resurfaced over the past couple of years.

Our current political conflicts and alignments are reminiscent of the twenties, too: this is hardly the first period in American history when politics chiefly meant identity politics. (Indeed, with the exception of the 1890s and the 1930s and its aftermath, American politics is *normally* identity politics.) The great issues around which twenties politics revolved—the drive to shut down immigration and preserve an old-stock American culture, the rise of a violent racist and nativist right—have their obvious current-day counterparts. In the twenties, black America despaired of coalition and turned to the self-help hype of Marcus Garvey, even as a sector of black America has turned to Louis Farrakhan today. In the twenties, the Scopes trial and the Sacco and Vanzetti case divided America along cultural and ethnic lines, much as the Simpson trial divides America along racial lines today.

And like their predecessors in the twenties, today's Republicans are better positioned than the Democrats to prevail in an increasingly ethnic-based politics. In the twenties, the Republicans were the party of Northern Protestants; the Democrats, the party both of big-city Northern Catholics and Southern Bible-Belt whites. Throughout the decade, the Democrats threatened to split apart on the questions of religion and ethnicity embodied in the candidacies of Tammany Hall's Al Smith; nothing short of the Great Depression was required to move the party beyond its civil wars.

Republicans of the Gingrich era have built their party on yet another rock of ethnic uniformity: as nearly as possible, they seek to be the party of the whites (a task that's easier now that Colin Powell has abandoned his flirtation with them). In the South in particular (and the Gingrich revolution is rooted in the realignment of the white South), the identification of party with race is reaching new heights; some recent polling in the Deep South has shown roughly 75 percent of whites voting for virtually any Republican and roughly 75 percent of blacks voting for virtually any Democrat. Under these conditions, an election is scarcely necessary; an eth-

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nic census will suffice.

The Democrats, by contrast, remain dependent on broad-based multiracial support if they are to succeed; to whatever degree elections do come to resemble an ethnic census, the Democrats are doomed. Since the white backlash first entered national politics in 1964, the Democrats have forestalled this possibility by clinging to their mantle as the party of social security and upward mobility. But with many of their supporters and potential supporters now downward- rather than upward-bound, that mantle has worn perilously thin.

In some ways, the parallel with the twenties may be too hopeful. In the twenties, after all, liberalism still had a number of prominent champions: George Norris, Fiorello LaGuardia, Robert La Follette come to mind. An equivalent list for the nineties is not easily adduced. In the twenties, an older, "native-stock" America lashed out at a distinct group of relative newcomers and the more cosmopolitan culture that came in their wake. In the nineties, many Americans are reacting to the freezing or decline of living standards by lashing out at a bewildering array of targets—at newcomers, non-white oldcomers, and a government they see as taxing them to benefit these other groups, while doing nothing to arrest the nation's moral and economic slide.

Perhaps most crucially, liberals of the twenties had already formulated, if partially and imperfectly, many of the economic remedies they were to set in place beginning in the thirties. From public power to minimum wages, from social insurance to greater aggregate purchasing power (though not yet deficit spending), the litany of New Deal remedies existed at least as talking points among liberal thinkers. Today's liberal agenda-makers are only just beginning to grapple with the even more vexing challenge of constructing a global mixed economy absent a global state.

It is, in short, a grand moment to succumb to the politics of moral witness—to offer critiques in the absence of plausible strategies. But there is a plausible strategy, even if it's not all that emotionally compelling, and it comes complete with two tracks. The first track is to derail the Gingrichites by any means available, which is to say, the Democrats. When the only electoral options are a desultory defense of a flawed status quo and a headlong descent into barbarism, the left has little choice but to throw in with the desultory defenders. The second track is to improve this dismal set of options by strengthening the movements of the left—a task made no easier by the fact that since November 1994, the movements of the left have grown depressingly more insular, or catatonic, or both.

With one notable exception.

Perestroika on 16th Street

The roots of the revolution in the AFL-CIO actually antedate the blowout of November 1994. They go back to a parting of the ways on strategy that became irrevocable in the summer of 1994, when the Federation's last stab at changing the pro-management tilt of the laws on organizing was strangled in its crib.

When Bill Clinton first won election, AFL-CIO chieftains Lane Kirkland and Tom Donahue came up with a stratagem. They induced the incoming administration to establish a commission, chaired by former Labor Secretary John Dunlop, that would strike a grand bargain: American business would consent to a more equitable labor law if the unions would embrace a more cooperative workplace.

In the summer of 1994, the first copy of the commission's report reached the AFL-CIO, and the Federation's legal staff called in the presidents and organizing directors of their largest unions to discuss it. Curiously, neither Kirkland nor Donahue was present. The report did call for stronger sanctions against corporations that violated the organizing rights of workers. To the dismay of the presidents and organizing directors, though, it called as well for repealing one of the most fundamental bases of American unionism—Section 8(a)(2) of the National Labor Relations Act, which outlawed company unions.

Over the next few minutes, a sickening realization spread through the room: *we can't even control our own goddam commission*. No one was more furious than AFSCME president Jerry McEntee, who reached for a marker, scribbled something on the report's back cover, and held it up for all to see. He had written two words: "Where's Lane?"

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For Kirkland's absence was emblematic of any number of larger absences—most fundamentally, of labor's withdrawal from the organizing wars. Certainly, labor's decline was in large part the result of factors over which the movement had no control—the decimation of American manufacturing, the willingness of corporations to violate the NLRA in order to defeat organizing drives. But it was also a consequence of the movement's utter abandonment of organizing. The most thorough survey of organizing we have, taken by Marshall Ganz and Richard Rothstein in the mid-eighties, showed that a scant 2 percent of the seven thousand union officials and staffers in California were engaged in anything even resembling organizing.

Not every union had gone gently into that good night, of course. Over the past fourteen years, for instance, the Service Employees (SEIU)—the union headed by John Sweeney, now the AFL-CIO's new president—had devoted 30 percent of its program budget to organizing campaigns among such presumably unorganizable workers as janitors and home health care employees. While overall union membership was shrinking to a paltry 15.5 percent of the workforce, the SEIU was growing from 625,000 to 1.1 million members. During this time, a number of other unions, most especially the Clothing and Textile workers in the South, also developed a guerilla organizing culture, working around a dysfunctional law by enlisting both veteran rank-and-filers and new recruits in successful organizing drives.

In the wake of the Dunlop debacle, during the fall of 1994, Sweeney called on Kirkland and asked him to free up Federation reserve funds for new organizing efforts: if the law wasn't going to be changed, there were still some proven, if irregular, strategies by which labor could organize. But Kirkland said no. Later that fall, after November's electoral disaster, McEntee also approached Kirkland and asked him to support Project '95, a labor alliance with Citizen Action and other groups directed at retaking the House two years hence. Again, Kirkland demurred. He believed that organizing could not proceed without broad-based support from outside the movement for changing labor law, but that labor's political action programs should eschew the taint of coalitions whenever possible.

These are strategic assumptions that the new regime at 16th Street has reversed. The Sweeney/Trumka/McEntee alliance that prevailed at this fall's AFL-CIO convention believes that deemphasizing organizing until Congress amends the law is tantamount to acquiescing in labor's demise. Thirty percent of the new Federation budget will go to the training and deployment of a new cadre of organizers, and additional resources to the development of strategic campaigns against anti-union corporations. By the same token, Sweeney & Company take a far less sectarian approach to grassroots political activity than Kirkland and his purist band. Labor's new leadership is at once more self-reliant and assertive in organizing, and better positioned to forge a common liberal agenda.

The revolution at the AFL-CIO is not merely the one piece of good news to which liberals can cling as the conservative tide washes over them. Labor's comeback is also the sine qua non for a renaissance of American liberalism, and the linchpin of any efforts to block the further tribalization of our politics.

It is difficult to imagine, for instance, how any liberal administration can deliver on the promise of rising incomes in the absence of unions—although a couple of years ago, the only liberal administration we have still seemed indifferent to unions' demise. The Clinton administration took office with a stated belief that increased training was the key to ending Americans' wage stagnation, and it seldom if ever adduced unions as even relevant to the income conundrum. It was a viewpoint with which Robert Reich in particular was identified; as recently as two years ago, the Secretary of Labor authored a Labor Day op-ed piece on the maldistribution of income that didn't mention unions once. Over the past two years, though, as productivity has risen and the income even of skilled workers has stagnated, Reich seems to have altered his views. Unions, he now insists, are indispensable to reversing the concentration of wealth.

Surely, they are also indispensable to any effort to revive a multiracial liberalism. In recent months, my own city, Los Angeles, has been

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deluged by post-O. J. discussions that dwell on our separateness, on how utterly devoid we are of any common points of reference, on how the epistemologies of race delimit what we see. As befits a city where history is just an obstacle to reinvention, hardly anyone has recalled that a mere twenty-two years ago, Los Angeles was considered a beacon of racial harmony, a city only 17 percent black that had nonetheless elected a black mayor (and re-elected him for the next twenty years). That multiracial liberalism was rooted in particular institutions, and nowhere more deeply than in the United Auto Workers, which in the course of a few short years in the 1960s had set up the main community-based organizations in both black and Latino L.A., come up with the early funding for Cesar Chavez's Farm Workers, and provided the shock troops for that most multiracial of presidential candidacies, Robert Kennedy's 1968 campaign.

And if we can't all get along in Los Angeles today, the fate of the UAW may have something to do with it: it's not here anymore. In the late seventies and early eighties, L.A. lost its auto factories; in recent years, it's lost much of its aerospace. As a consequence, the UAW's Western region, which had been headquartered in and around Los Angeles since World War II, was abolished last year. The nearest regional headquarters is now in St. Louis. To the many who now decry the rise of identity politics, we must remind them that it did not rise in a vacuum, but rather, on the ashes of an organized working class. And to those who wish to move liberalism off the defensive, the revival of American labor is just about the only game in town. □

David Moberg

CAN LABOR CHANGE?

"In just six months we've changed the labor movement," newly elected AFL-CIO president John J. Sweeney told the labor federation's convention delegates last October. "Now we're going to change America." It was the bravado of victory speeches, to be sure, but there was just enough truth—or plausibility—in his statement to take it seriously.

There's no denying the change wrought simply by the first challenge ever to an incumbent AFL-CIO president. The leaders of unions with about 56 percent of AFL-CIO members, notably AFSCME (public workers) and the Service Employees (SEIU), not only forced former president Lane Kirkland to resign, but, more important, opened a public debate in the AFL-CIO about strategy. The actual debate was often shallow and oblique, and even interim incumbent Thomas Donahue agreed with most of challenger Sweeney's proposals to beef up organizing, politics, and strategic assistance to affiliated unions. But the election contest gave new legitimacy to some heretofore heretical ideas: internal challenges to leaders, blunt self-criticism of shortcomings, and more democratic dialogue over the future of unions.

This might seem tame, but for the stuffy central organization of the American labor movement, it was nearly revolutionary. But the AFL-CIO president has little power and a relatively small budget. Remaking the labor movement depends on the 78 unions in the federation drastically changing themselves and uniting behind a new strategy.

Sixty-one-year-old Sweeney, a genial, portly man described even by opponents as "sweet," can do something despite his limited formal powers. He can set a tone for organized labor. He can define issues, provide some incentives for action, appeal for cooperation, and highlight

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important causes and promising models. He can also play an enlarged public role as a tribune for working people. Though Sweeney's extemporaneous speaking style is often mushy and uninspiring, he can call for help from stemwinding secretary-treasurer Richard Trumka (former Mineworkers president) and from Linda Chavez-Thompson, a former AFSCME vice-president in the newly created post of executive vice-president.

Chavez-Thompson is also the first person of color and the second woman, following Donahue's secretary-treasurer, Barbara Easterling, to hold an executive position in an American labor federation. With her election, organized labor, whose leaders and members are still disproportionately white men, symbolically recognized how important both women and people of color will be for its growth.

Ultimately, however, the labor movement has to be rebuilt from the ground up. The political legacy of the New Deal has been nearly exhausted. Though its labor law has been rendered meaningless, some New Deal monuments, like Social Security, manage to survive. But neither the Democrats nor organized labor can go on citing those achievements as a reason for workers' continued support. They must demonstrate that they have new solutions for new problems, and they will need a much more ideologically informed and democratically involved rank and file to forge new public policies and centers of working-class power.

The new leaders, and their supporters, have the will to make dramatic efforts to revive the labor movement. Now the question is, can they find the means?

Fundamentally, Sweeney, Trumka and Chavez-Thompson want labor to be a social movement again. That means becoming the core institution defending workers in general, advocating their rights, and helping them win greater power for themselves at work and in politics.

Unions have become distant, often anonymous insurance agents for many workers, doing nothing to make them feel part of a broader social family of working people. According to a survey conducted by Peter D. Hart Associates for the AFL-CIO, whereas only one-third of Americans are strongly hostile toward unions and a majority see unions as good for their members, by a wide margin Americans do not see unions as helping either the nation or workers as a whole. Even low-income unorganized workers who favor collective approaches for the severe problems they experience at work do not typically think of unions as possible solutions. Only a slim plurality of those polled sided with unions over management, through a solid majority (52 to 17 percent) said they supported workers against management.

Sweeney sounded the call for a renewed movement in his acceptance speech. "Our unions are all that stand between America and shrinking paychecks, disappearing jobs, vanishing health care, increasing inequality, and more racism, rancor, and resentment," he said. "The most important thing we can do starting right now, today, is to organize every working woman and man who needs a better deal and a new voice .... If anyone denies American workers their constitutional right to freedom of association, we will use old-fashioned mass demonstrations as well as sophisticated corporate campaigns to make worker rights the civil rights issue of the 1990s."

The time is ripe for this new crusade in many regards. Most workers face a panoply of economic problems: stagnant or declining real incomes, growing inequality of both wealth and income, increased insecurity about both jobs and retirement income, worries about employment and education prospects for children, and increased pressure on the job, from mandatory overtime to intensified workloads.

Though productivity continues to rise and American corporations are increasingly competitive in the world economy, workers do not benefit. Nobody, least of all American corporations, seems to be looking out for jobs and incomes of American workers, as the gales of globalism sweep through the economy.

Yet the law is in practice extremely hostile to workers who want to organize, strike, or show solidarity with one another. Republicans have been working to dismantle remaining worker protections—trying to slash budgets for enforcement of worker rights and occupational safety. House Republicans voted to eliminate wage floors for private contractors hired by the gov-

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ernment and to reduce tax credits for low-wage workers. Not content with having weakened most traditional labor weapons, they are trying to outlaw new tools unions have developed (like corporate campaigns that use stockholder pressure tactics).

Big corporations are bigger than ever, often spanning the globe with production facilities, willing to spend lavishly to fight unions, and often sufficiently diversified so that a battle on one front can be easily weathered. (Even a big, rich union like the United Auto Workers represents only about 16 percent of Caterpillar's worldwide work force, giving Cat the winning edge in the union's two long strikes in the past four years.) Trends in world trade and finance, reinforced by the demands of transnational corporations, have pushed countries inexorably towards unfettered free market economic policies. Freer trade and faster capital mobility have created new competition among the world's less-skilled workers (which includes roughly 70 percent of the U.S. work force by most calculations), pressing down wages and increasing inequality.

In the face of this transnational colossus, there is a growing sense among victims and potential critics of the futility of opposition, especially of a collective sort, and a weary conclusion that there is no alternative to free-market capitalism. Disillusionment with politics and public life makes it difficult to organize unions or mobilize for elections, let alone demonstrations. (It is significant that the biggest recent demonstration in Washington, the Million Man March, placed virtually no demands on government or corporations and, unlike the 1963 civil rights march, had no union presence.)

Sweeney, whose own union is the fastest growing in the AFL-CIO, rightly wants to make organizing labor's top priority. Without more members, unions will have little political clout and little bargaining power. Facing the new challenge of global capitalism, the goal of unions remains taking wages and working conditions out of competition. For much of the growing service sector, it is not an implausible goal if more workers were organized, and many are ripe for organizing, since they now work for very poor pay and under unpleasant, insecure conditions. Even for much of manufacturing, global competitive pressures do not doom workers' demands, since in many highly automated industries, productivity is high and direct labor costs are relatively tiny. (Labor's power would be enhanced in such cases if it were coupled with industrial policies to promote technological innovation or, obviously, constraints on capital mobility.)

Abandoning the notion of the past few decades that the AFL-CIO had no role to play in organizing, Sweeney wants to establish a $20 million a year fund for organizing. The fund will likely be used to encourage ambitious multi-union organizing projects that might otherwise not get started, like the Los Angeles Manufacturing Action Project or a campaign to organize Silicon Valley, or to encourage organizing in strategic sectors, like health care. Though the fund can serve as a catalyst for organizing, participating unions will have to provide the vast bulk of funds themselves. Indeed, one of Sweeney's main tasks will be to nudge unions to boost their budgets for organizing from an average of less than 5 percent of their income to 30 percent or more, as both SEIU and UNITE (formed from a merger of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union) have done.

In a dramatic nod to the civil rights movement, Sweeney also wants to recruit a thousand organizers for a "union summer" of organizing in 1996. He wants to establish a special project to organize the South. Such a dramatic increase in the scale of organizing, combined with strategic targeting of entire industries, corporations or regions instead of organizing worksite by worksite, could change the entire climate of organizing. It could become a much more public activity, reinforced by the recognition that others are taking the same step.

As employers fight back, Sweeney intends to raise the stakes. For example, instead of simply filing unfair labor practice charges with the National Labor Relations Board and waiting months or years for a decision when a pro-union worker is fired, unions are likely to mount vociferous public protests, including civil disobedience, to protect workers' rights to organize.

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The trampled rights of workers then are likely to become political issues, not private tragedies.

At SEIU Sweeney approved the use of civil disobedience and disruptive direct action as a tactic when workers' legal rights to organize were abused, and the AFL-CIO is likely to encourage more such actions. Donahue denounced this as likely to "marginalize" the labor movement.

Union advocates of nonviolent direct action argue that society is likely to pay attention to workers' demands for rights only when there is an intolerable level of social disruption. After many months of escalating campaigns against big real estate developers and managers in Washington, D.C., SEIU's Justice for Janitors campaign began blocking bridges into the city from the suburbs. It was a statement to those real estate magnates—and suburbanites who profit from the District but do not pay taxes in it—that if the needs of janitors and the District's citizens are not met, business will not go on as usual.

Direct action risks public backlash, especially if a campaign does not build its case well in advance, but pusillanimity in cases where rights are abused and ignored typically entails the greater risk of failure. When direct action works, it adds an aura of heroism and moral fervor that can inspire other workers and potential allies.

The lessons from the best organizing campaigns—reinforced by polling data—suggest that unions can organize despite the legal, political, and economic odds if workers are encouraged to act like a union from the beginning, developing a sense of power and the commitment that comes with struggling to create their own, democratic union. Unorganized workers respond best when approached personally at home, especially by unionized workers from other workplaces. In short, when the union is not a third party "insurance agent" but an organization of workers themselves, it is most likely to succeed in both the short and long run.

Yet most existing unions do not mobilize their members to take control of their organization and to take action on their own behalf. Unions must become more democratic; they must educate and mobilize their members. They need member volunteers as well as staff to organize, if they are to be effective and operate on the large scale needed simply to prevent further loss of union density, let alone rebuild from 15.5 percent of the work force at present to the 35 percent organized at the postwar peak.

Creative strategies have become more important. Sweeney has plans for the AFL-CIO to establish new funds to support high-profile, difficult labor disputes—like the "war zone" battles of the past several years involving several unions in Decatur, Illinois. He plans to set up a new strategic action center that will help locate more corporate vulnerabilities to labor pressure and to monitor global corporations more closely.

Some unions already have turned with fervor to campaigns that rely on public allies, regulatory pressure, and spreading the cost of labor disputes to allies and customers of the employer with whom they're fighting. They are more frequently employing inside campaigns, where workers stay on the job and protest or "work to rule," effectively slowing production. They are also relying much more on global solidarity with other unions to apply pressure on transnational employers. Sweeney plans to escalate AFL-CIO support for all of those actions.

These plans highlight a certain irony. Sweeney's regime is likely to—indeed, it must—bring about a new centralization of the American labor movement (as well as encourage more union mergers, such as the planned unification of the UAW, Machinists and Steelworkers). The American labor movement has been weak in part because it is so fragmented.

Yet at the same time, there is a need to push power and responsibility down into the hands of members. Local unions must also be strengthened as primary centers of activity. Central labor councils of unions in a metropolitan area need to be revived. Other coalitions, such as Jobs With Justice or the anti-NAFTA or single-payer health care campaigns, need to be encouraged, with unions more willing to participate without insisting on control. Within unions, there is a need to revive—formally or informally—the old ideal of the union steward system, where there is a strong union representative for every few

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dozen workers. In local areas, unions could recreate the equivalent of the CIO "flying squadrons," groups of militant workers who were ready to deploy themselves to picket lines and protests of other workers.

Balancing centralized strategic planning with decentralized grass-roots activity is not easy, but with strong democracy and internal debate, it is at least possible. Union officials must become movement leaders more than organizational administrators (or petty autocrats).

Yet it is not enough to rely on rank-and-file democracy as the guarantor of truth and wisdom. Political analyst Guy Molyneux, who took part in an extensive focus group survey of union members' political attitudes last summer, was stunned at the workers' lack of any explanatory framework—even a crude Keynesian ideology—that would help them make sense of what was happening to them. That lack of framework makes them vulnerable to the simple, persuasive but dangerously wrong ideology of the right: government and high taxes are the problem, not the solution, and the country is going to pot because of too many uppity (fill in the blank with the scapegoats du jour). The Democratic party no longer provides a popular explanation, nor for the most part does the labor movement. As Economic Policy Institute president Jeff Faux argues, they have surrendered the battle of ideas to the conservatives while trying to patch together programs that add up to an electoral majority.

Although many unions, especially in the near term, will work for Clinton and all other Democrats to beat back the Gingrichian hordes, Sweeney and Trumka have at least articulated the view that the Democrats must adopt a more worker-centered politics—or else. But what will the "or else" be? A few union leaders, and more lower-level officials, support third party initiatives, like Labor Party Advocates (through which organizer Tony Mazzocchi wants to advance a labor agenda, not to run candidates).

Most of the leaders disgruntled with the Democrats talk about trying to use their resources more effectively within the two-party framework. They are likely to be slightly more selective about which Democrat gets money and to exercise more control over their own political operations. They may devote as much effort to educating members and the public on issues vital to workers as to endorsing candidates. Some unions may run, or at least support, rival Democratic primary candidates in order to shift the party more towards workers' concerns. But the Sweeney regime in the near term is not likely to represent a dramatic political break with the past, except to train larger numbers of more sophisticated political organizers and polish an often creaky political machine.

Ultimately, however, the new regime will need to tackle the question: what does labor want? Gompers's old line about more schools and less jails is still valid but hardly adequate. It is also true, but not sufficient, to say, as Sweeney did, that "America needs a raise."

If Sweeney wants to make workers' rights the civil rights issue of the nineties, then the cause of workers has to have a strong moral appeal. It must go beyond better wages to establish the legitimacy, even the primacy, of workers' rights as embodying the interests of the national community, not simply the self-interest of workers. Politics in this country continues to be fought out in the language of rights, but the rights of workers are rarely asserted. In claiming such rights, however, workers' advocates would do well to recognize that when the broader community grants any rights, to property or labor, there is a corollary responsibility to use those rights with the best interests of that community as a whole in mind.

A workers' bill of rights might start with the right to meaningful work—broadly defined to

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include education and work that goes beyond jobs in the for-profit business world—for all who want and need it. That work should provide "fair" pay that reflects not just what the market will bear but what someone reasonably needs for a good life.

A workers' bill of rights would include freedom of expression on the job and the right to organize a union without interference from employers. It would include a right to discuss and bargain about all conditions of work, including what have been traditionally called managerial prerogatives. Workers should have the right to strike or take other collective action on these issues, or to support fellow workers, without being fired or permanently replaced. Indeed, they should be protected not only from discrimination but from any firing without just cause. As labor lawyer and author Tom Geoghegan has argued, violation of basic worker rights, like the right to organize, should be subject to the same severe punitive damages now provided for civil rights violations.

Workers should have the right to reasonable hours of work without forced overtime and with substantial guaranteed annual time for leisure and family, including paid leave for care of infants or sick members of the family. All workers should have a right to a safe and healthy workplace and to assured health care and adequate pensions, whether through their jobs or public programs.

Workers deserve such rights because they are minimum requirements for what we want to create as "the American way of life." They are critical for democracy, community and even families to flourish. Through these rights, workers assert that they are not like other factors of production, that the market is a tool to be used to serve people's needs, not a tyranny to which people must submit. Unlike many of the rights campaigns of liberals in past decades, worker rights represent a claim by the vast majority against a relatively small minority of managers and property owners.

These rights represent a claim not just for freedom but for power. They call for a direct voice in affairs of work and public life. With a populist workers' rights movement, workers would implicitly insist on a citizenship that extends through the door of the workplace. They would renew the dormant strain of political thought in American culture that seeks democracy on the job and addresses not only the size of the paycheck or even the extent of the social wage but rather the structure of power and the power of property.

Achieving and giving substance to these rights would radically challenge the culture of contemporary American capitalism, but such rights are hardly incompatible with capitalism. Most are already guaranteed in many European countries. Yet to secure these rights for American workers in the new global economy, unions will have to fight to extend them to workers everywhere, through international trade and human rights agreements as well as direct pressure on transnational corporations. The universality of such rights, transcending ethnicity, gender, and nationality, gives them a special legitimacy and provides a common focus for unity among otherwise antagonistic groups.

Sweeney's goal of making worker rights the civil rights issue of the coming decades requires articulating a broad vision that workers can accept as a just basis for their actions and demands. Yet it is reasonable to start with the simpler, narrow demand for the right to organize without fear of reprisal. Only by organizing will the full vision of worker rights begin to emerge and have any chance to be realized. It will take a fight, as in the civil rights movement or the CIO organizing drive, to organize on a grand scale, but that fight could precipitate a huge shift toward more humane politics in America. Without it the country faces a harsh, brutal, and chaotic future. If Sweeney and company can change the labor movement, then there is a chance that America can change as well. □

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Michael Kazin

ALTERNATIVE POLITICS

Is a Third Party the Way Out?

Seventy years ago, American elites knew how to enforce the two-party system. "In 1924," Robert and Helen Lynd reported in their classic study, *Middletown*, "[I]t was considered such 'bad business' to vote for the third party [the Progressives, who ran Robert La Follette for president] that literally no one of the business group confessed publicly before or after the election to adherence to this ticket. 'If we could discover the three people who disgraced our district by voting for La Follette,' declared one business class woman vehemently, 'we'd certainly make it hot for them!'"

In this case, Middletown (real name—Muncie, Indiana) was typical of the nation. In 1924, Robert La Follette received 16.6 percent of the popular vote. But he carried only his own state of Wisconsin, and the Progressive party—a jerry-built coalition of unionists, small farmers, and left-wing reformers—collapsed soon after the election. The two-party lock on power and legitimate political discourse was secure and remained so—with the partial exception of George Wallace's run in 1968—until Ross Perot's remarkable campaign in 1992.

What a difference one billionaire populist has made. As I write (in mid-November), no fewer than four men of national prominence (Jesse Jackson, Bill Bradley, Lowell Weicker, and Perot again) are considering independent campaigns for president. Meanwhile, on the left, several groups are vying to assemble a national network of activists capable of spearheading an alternative list of candidates. On the right, a U.S. Taxpayers party, led by veteran gadfly Howard Phillips, threatens to rally Christian conservatives if the 1996 GOP platform compromises on abortion. Defenders of the old electoral order like columnist William Safire condemn "irresponsible third-party patter." But with a majority of Americans telling pollsters they would welcome another choice, the only question seems to be who can best meet the demand.

Yet, as often happens in American politics, this ostensible break with tradition is being oversold. Journalists routinely gloss over the distinction between a third party and one or more serious independent candidates for president. The latter have been almost routine during the twentieth century: Teddy Roosevelt in 1912, La Follette in 1924, William Lemke in 1936, Strom Thurmond and Henry Wallace in 1948, George Wallace in 1968, John Anderson in 1980, and Perot in 1992. All of them, at the start of their campaigns, benefited from an outpouring of grassroots enthusiasm and appeared certain to have a major effect on the outcome of the election. And TR and Perot had a realistic chance for victory.

But not since the 1890s has there been a national third party with any sustained appeal to voters. Outside the domain of generally hopeless sects (Marxist, right-to-life, LaRoucheite, and so on), the last alternative vehicle to run candidates across the country in more than one election was the People's party, a full century ago. And even the Populists declined rapidly after they endorsed a Democrat, William Jennings Bryan, for president in 1896.

Historians and political scientists have offered two kinds of explanations for third-party futility. The first focuses, like the anecdote from *Middletown*, on the renewable powers of the political ins. In the 1890s, to turn back the Popu-

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list challenge, the major parties began acting, in a consistent and usually bipartisan way, to punish or seduce their would-be competitors. And they've never stopped.

Over the years, Democrats and Republicans changed state election laws to make it quite difficult and expensive to mount a serious third-party campaign. Government-printed secret ballots replaced the custom of individual parties distributing their own tickets as ballots—thus diluting the function of parties. Petitions for ballot space had to be circulated within a rigid time period and receive a precise allotment of signatures (a minimum number from each county, for example). In order to get listed on some state ballots, a third party had to capture a high number of votes on its very first attempt. Under the 1974 Federal Election Campaign Act, trumpeted as a post-Watergate "reform" measure, major party candidates receive matching funds during their races, but alternative party hopefuls don't get their 5 percent until the campaign ends.

When legal barriers don't suffice, there is always co-optation. Ronald Reagan's candidacy for president in 1976 convinced ardent rightists like Pat Buchanan to stop talking about a conservative third party, much as FDR's move to the left in the mid-thirties doused plans for a labor party. The major parties are ideologically flexible, to be sure. But it is an elasticity that badly conceals an iron spine of self-interest.

The second type of explanation points in a different direction—to the hollowing out of the major players themselves. How can you organize a third political party when all parties seem old-fashioned, unprincipled, and powerless to change what ails the nation? Although the Democrats and Republicans still dominate the selection process for all federal and most state offices, party loyalty and identification have been declining since the early 1950s. More than 60 percent of Americans routinely split their tickets, and fewer than half of voters under 30 have a strong allegiance to either party.

As both cause and effect of this erosion, neither major party can boast a vibrant internal life or provide the essential ladder every aspiring politician must climb to higher office. As Michael Huffington demonstrated in his primary race for the U.S. Senate in 1994, a clever media campaign and a personal fortune can overwhelm opponents who have worked their way through a party's ranks. Strike the fancy of Larry King or Rush Limbaugh or any sizeable chunk of the mass media, and you can virtually ignore the party regulars—a vanishing breed, in any case. "For Mr. Perot, local politics is a local TV station," quips political scientist Theodore J. Lowi.

Such familiar details have a devastating effect on prospects for any third party, even the well-financed one Perot launched this fall. Creators of an electoral alternative that hopes to endure must do more than skillfully navigate the legal obstacle course and put forth a political message both attractive to millions of voters and clearly different from that of standard-bearers from the major parties. They must accomplish the same kinds of tasks the old parties were so good at in their heyday: the knitting together of diverse constituency groups; the grooming of credible candidates for office at all levels; the discipline to draw sharp, repetitive distinctions between your virtues and the vices of the competitor. The Republicans, although they have not convinced many Americans to believe in parties again, have to some degree revived these organizational crafts. That is one reason they took control of Congress in the 1994 election and are now competitive in a solid majority of congressional districts and in every state but the District of Columbia.

A third party would have to duplicate the GOP's feat quickly and do so, at least initially, with untested activists, sorely inadequate finances, and scant media attention. The task demands a kind of perseverance and strategic acumen that are not abundantly evident among the kinds of people who are currently attracted to third parties, either on the left or the right. The Christian Coalition is the one group that has the clarity of purpose as well as the numbers and grassroots energy a new party requires. But why would Ralph Reed and Pat Robertson give up their formidable clout in the GOP for such a will-o'-the-wisp? The very thinness of the major parties, the waning of their traditional identity, leaves them open to partial capture by organized constituencies who know precisely what they

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want and are willing to toil patiently and opportunistically to get it.

This dismal outlook has done little to dampen third-party ardor. In the best American tradition, the landscape proliferates with angry optimists who refuse to accept more of what the governmental and corporate elites have wrought. At present, much of the alternative action takes place on the left. As long as Gingrichism seems the crest of a conservative future, only the most purist of right-wingers (like Howard Phillips) or those who view political power as nothing but an elite conspiracy will refuse to get on the GOP bandwagon.

There are three notable efforts underway on the left to accomplish the exceedingly difficult: the Green Politics Network, Labor Party Advocates, and the New Party. The trio shares a bundle of valid, if predictable, antipathies: to corporations that operate "mean and lean" and despoil the environment; to the way both major parties protect the interests of big business and wage class warfare on the poor and the unionized; and to Bill Clinton's failure to address, much less do anything to alter, such conditions. As Green Politics organizer Linda Martin asserts, "Every time the man opens his mouth, he alienates another constituency. Does he really believe these groups, mainly minorities and other traditional Democratic Party faithful, have nowhere else to go?"

No agreement exists, however, about what that destination should be or how to get there. The Green Network is a lofty idea struggling to be a viable movement. It seeks to group, under one spreading redwood, radical environmentalists and feminists, multicultural leftists, campaigners against the military budget, and that dwindling if hardy fraction of citizens who still call themselves "socialist." Some Green activists plan tc run a presidential ticket in 1996, seeing such a move as essential to gain media coverage for their cause.

Unfortunately, this appears to be a utopian reach for the stars that is poorly equipped to get off the ground. At a national conference the Green Network called in Washington, D.C. this past June, the one hundred or so delegates (representing some forty tiny organizations) issued a Common Ground Declaration that amounts to a dream list of the post-sixties left. The universal right to housing, jobs, and health care snuggles up next to demands for "community-controlled law enforcement" and an expansion of affirmative action. Since consensus was their goal, conference delegates spent nearly all their time trying to reach it. At present, Green parties exist in seventeen states but have ballot access in only five. Without a clear set of priorities and a way to attract more than the usual radical suspects, they will not get much farther.

A band of left unionists is taking a more sober approach. Begun in the summer of 1990, Labor Party Advocates (LPA) represents the first attempt in more than half a century (not counting the Marxist sects) to provide wage earners with an independent political voice. Led by Tony Mazzocchi, a former top official of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers union (OCAW), the organization was designed to grow slowly, picking up endorsements from local unions before stalwarts ever go before television cameras to "speak for labor." Half a decade later, only three small international unions—OCAW, the United Electrical Workers, and the Maintenance of Way Employees—and a scattering of citywide labor councils have signed on. But rank-and-file sympathy increased around the country after the Clinton administration aggressively promoted NAFTA and GATT and made clear its lack of interest in the fate of unions. The LPA slogan— "The Bosses Have Two Parties, We Should Have at Least One" —began to seem more like a genuine cry of protest and less like a scrap of nostalgia.

There's confusion, however, about how to turn what is now an internal union phenomenon into something grander. Mazzochi and his comrades understand the need to build a class-based groundswell before running their own candidates for office. But they have avoided drafting a platform for fear of enmeshing supporters in a thicket of dilemmas: defend manufacturing jobs or call for public job creation? Promote a guaranteed annual income for all or simply push for higher wages for the already employed? Cut ties with the Democrats or become a more cohesive and militant faction within a major party in crisis? The LPA's first national conference, scheduled for June, should begin resolving such questions.

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Looming over the whole enterprise, however, is the question of whether American wage earners, in any substantial numbers, can be persuaded to support a politics centered on the health and beneficence of the labor movement. One of the hallmarks of postindustrial society has been the weakening of self-identifications based on workplace hierarchies. Encouraged by the mass media, unions, to many Americans, seem not merely punchless but old-fashioned, the creatures of a disappearing blue-collar world. Based in an environment under siege, LPA lacks the ability to speak to Americans who don't share that niche. The organization will have a chance to prosper only if a renaissance of unionism occurs. And, for the present, the AFL-CIO's new leaders seem committed to the Democrats.

One group of third-party hopefuls on the left does grasp the need to get beyond older models, whether trotted out by grandiose post-sixties radicals or the union faithful. The New Party's name is terribly bland but reasonably accurate. Begun in 1992, the NP seeks to build a bridge out of the Democratic party for a range of progressive activists, yet recognizes how slow the passage will be. Its organizers, who claim a membership of six thousand, ambitiously vow to represent every interest on the fragmented left—to be, in the words of Sandy Pope and Joel Rogers, "a racially diverse, feminist, reform-minded, green and unapologetically pro-working-people and pro-consumer party." In practice, however, they emphasize economic issues like a much higher minimum wage and an end to corporate campaign-giving on which each of the fragments can agree.

And unlike the Green Network and LPA, the New Party has thought creatively about how it might grow. Its strategy is to build up from strong local chapters that keep their electoral options open. An NP affiliate might run its own candidates for school board and city council while backing a liberal or moderate Democrat for Congress—but urging people to vote for her on the New Party line. Fusion is a way, says NP Executive Director Dan Cantor, "to cast a protest vote that counts." As precedent, he cites New York state where, at different points in the fairly recent past, the American Labor, Liberal, and Conservative parties were able to exert a price for endorsing major-party candidates. NP activists also lobby for a system of proportional representation to greatly improve their chance of escaping the lesser-evil syndrome that has bedeviled most alternative candidates in this century. Meanwhile, the party only contests races it has a chance to win; so, in 1996, Dan Cantor is sure he'll vote for Bill Clinton.

This quiet, sensible approach appeals to those with a temperament for what Irving Howe called the politics of "steady work." But will it catch on in an age when dash and celebrity reign in the public realm? To date, the NP has run or endorsed candidates in some 115 races—most on the city or county level—and won 77 of them. In his standard pitch, Cantor heralds no officeholders of the party's own and, when all politics is local, it is difficult to know whether fusion was a decisive factor in a particular victory. Right now, the NP seems most successful in helping cobble together municipal coalitions—as in a group called Progressive Milwaukee that has united public-sector unions, black ministers, and environmentalists behind some of the same citywide candidates. It's a worthy endeavor, but one that avoids the harder question of how to persuade Americans to listen to left ideas and fresh social-democratic proposals. For all its practical planning, the New Party shares a familiar and critical flaw with its utopian left cousins. All believe they have a natural base among millions of nonvoters, what Cantor calls "the big hole in the American electorate." These disheartened citizens—who are disproportionately nonwhite, wage-earning, and without a college education—would, the theory goes, flock to a third party that spoke to their needs. The main task is thus to distribute the message, not to change minds—except about the possibility of victory.

This isn't the first time the recent American left reminds one, uncomfortably, of Talleyrand's remark about the Bourbons who "have learned nothing, and forgotten nothing." Campaigners for George McGovern in 1972 and against Ronald Reagan in the early eighties held out the same hope of a silent near-majority that would flock to a forthright message of economic democracy and multicultural tolerance. When the

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NP's Dan Cantor refers to opinion polls that show that Americans favor more investment in education and cuts in military spending, he's singing an old tune. If people only had a "real choice," the dark night of reaction would soon give way to a progressive dawn.

Unfortunately, that notion ignores the dynamics of history, as well as the mood of nonvoters. A political transformation in a democratic country is almost always preceded by popular insurgencies that make change seem plausible and then pressure office-holders to favor reform. With the main exception of the pro-choice movement, grassroots rebels have, for the past quarter-century, been soldiers for the right.

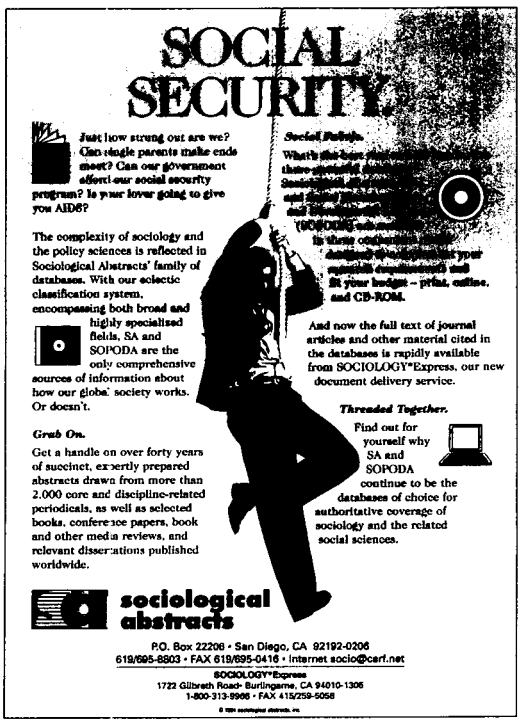
There is no evidence that nonvoters are eager to buck that current. Many, in fact, express their apathy in the same antigovernment terms favored by the Gingrichs and Gramms—without, of course, expecting conservatives to solve their problems. And, in their diversity, the cultural views of those who stay away from the polls would not gladden defenders of abortion rights or immigrants. (One indication of where nonvoters stand is party registration under the Motor Voter bill that was passed in 1993. There are as many new Republicans as Democrats.)

Leftists can't adequately respond to the question, "What do the feds ever do for me?" simply by promising to do more if we ever take power. One NP activist recently argued the need to tell an "alternative story" of what ails the American economy and our civic culture, one that targets international corporate power instead of big government and the dependent poor. But wary citizens are more likely to accept such an argument from movements that form around urgent issues—like health care and declining wages—than from a third party based in the remaining liberal enclaves.

Meanwhile, opportunity resides in a discredited location. Would-be insurgents on the left may be too quick to write off the Democratic party. The developing split between President Clinton's born-again centrism and the economic populist stance taken by House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt and others in Congress could render the party incapable of projecting a unified message in the 1996 campaign. But it also should give pragmatic leftists a chance to gain a hearing for a class-aware message and programs that could attract alienated constituencies.

Notwithstanding their cynicism toward the state, most Americans still support a higher minimum wage, universal and affordable health care, increased child-care credits, and a more progressive tax system.

Tattered as it is, the Democratic label still echoes fond and widely shared memories of the New Deal and an interracial civil rights movement. As Ralph Reed and his troops have mobilized within the GOP, left activists and intellectuals could work within the other major party to develop and gather strength for a politics of class justice, racial tolerance, and cultural decency. In 1996, this makes more sense than hankering after a third party whose odds for success are long. Radicals are good at interpreting the electoral shell game; the point, however, is to get us moving forward again. □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Sanford Levinson

A CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Does The Left Fear Popular Sovereignty?

Among the most controversial opinions in this past year's term of the United States Supreme Court was *U.S. Term Limits* v. *Thornton*, where five justices, over the bitter dissent of their four colleagues, struck down Arkansas's attempt to impose term limits on candidates for the House and Senate. Justice Stevens concluded his opinion for the majority by emphasizing that term limits "must come not by legislation adopted either by Congress or by an individual State, but, rather . . . through the Amendment procedures set forth in Article V."

What one immediately thinks of when reading such a sentence, I suspect, is the "traditional" procedure of two-thirds of each house of Congress agreeing to "propose" an amendment coupled with ratification by three-quarters of the state legislatures. That is a formidably difficult process, successful (at most) only twenty-seven times in our 208-year history. (Some scholars dispute the validity of the Twenty-seventh Amendment, proposed in 1791 and declared ratified only in 1992.) Congressional defeats this past spring of the Balanced Budget and Term Limits amendments highlight the difficulty of winning (or even really beginning) "the constitutional amendment game," especially when, as with term limits, the direct interests of legislators themselves are challenged.

Even if one opposes term limits as a matter of public policy, ought one take pleasure in the fact that the popular majority that apparently favors them will, like most proponents of amending the text, be unable to get their way? Is justified opposition to the balanced budget amendment enough to justify also its failure even to be sent on to the states for their consideration because thirty-four senators were able to cancel the support of more than two-thirds of the House of Representatives and of almost two-thirds of the Senate, which presumably mirrored a strong level of support by the general public? Or is it possible that these failures are simply the latest demonstration that the "amendment game" is indefensibly stacked in favor of the "defense," that is, those who oppose *any* given amendment?

The practical meaning of the American rules is that proponents of formal textual changes must capture political control of at least seventy-seven legislative assemblies—two houses of Congress plus the bicameral legislatures of thirty-seven states and the unicameral legislature of Nebraska. It obviously follows that the opponents win the game by capturing control only of one third plus one of either house of Congress or of only one house in a total of thirteen states, as exemplified by the failure of ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in the late 1970s (an addition to the text that I assume was supported by most readers of *Dissent*). So the two-thirds and three-quarters requirements in fact *understate* the actualities, especially at the state level. For proponents of amendment could in fact get the endorsement of eighty-seven state legislative houses, but still lose because of the loss of the remaining thirteen. It is as if the visiting team in a baseball game got only one out per inning while the home team continued to bat until the traditional three outs. Why would anyone think such a game, whether in the stadium or in our polity, makes sense?

William Gladstone might have thought the United States Constitution to be "the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time bythe

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brain and purpose of man," but even were that true, that would not guarantee perfection. To err, after all, is the essence of being human. As George Washington put it, "The warmest friends and the best supporters the Constitution has do not contend that it is free from imperfections." Fortunately, though, "there is a Constitutional door open" that allows us to respond to such imperfections. The question is whether it is open wide enough.

One can learn much by looking at the decisions made by those who have designed state and national constitutions since 1787. Relatively few features of the United States Constitution, including its obstacles to change, are reflected in foreign constitutions; this is even more true of the fifty American states, none of which has chosen to emulate the national constitution in regard to the difficulty of constitutional amendment. University of Houston political scientist Donald Lutz has analyzed all of these state constitutions and thirty national constitutions and developed what he calls an "index of difficulty" in regard to the procedures by which amendments are proposed and adopted. For example, are processes majoritarian or super-majoritarian? How many different institutions must acquiesce to constitutional change? Do proposals have to be ratified by the public in a referendum? The easier the process, the lower the index number. The lowest number was Austria's 0.80, though Sweden trailed quite closely behind at 1.00. The average index of the national constitutions examined by Lutz is 3.26; for the fifty American states, the average index is 2.92. For better or worse, the United States Constitution is well above either of these averages; indeed, its index number of 5.10 won it a second-place ranking, behind only the former Yugoslavia's 5.60. Given recent events, one presumes that the Yugoslav Constitution is no more and that the U.S. Constitution is now the most-difficult-to-amend document of any national constitution, well ahead of the Swiss and Venezuelan Constitutions, which tie at 4.75. Not surprisingly, both the Austrian and Swedish Constitutions have been frequently amended, whereas high index countries, which also include Australia (4.60), Germany (4.60), and Spain (4.60), formally amend their documents more infrequently.

The word "formally" is crucial in the previous sentence. In practice, there is an important alternative to such formality; the political system can simply engage in a process that some political scientists call "amendment by interpretation." Indeed, Lutz suggests that just such a process characterizes high-index countries. Judges (or other officials) simply adjust accepted understandings of a constitution to accord with what are thought to be contemporary necessities and offer opinions purporting to explain why these adjustments do not require navigating the system of formal amendment. Although trained lawyers are often apoplectic at these "interpretations," the public often is not, depending entirely on the perceived consequences of the policies under discussion. This may be just fine, so long as there is a general public consensus behind the new constitutional norms and it is additionally understood that "constitutional interpretation" may have little to do with what the naive might view as interpreting that text called the Constitution of the United States (or other high-index constitutions). It is obvious that any such consensus has long evaporated and that many citizens are less accepting of the cynical evocation of the sacred symbol of the Constitution to mask political decisions made by relatively unaccountable judicial elites. It seems hard to argue that there are no social costs when amendment-by-interpretation takes over from the formal procedures set out in the constitutional text and taught to innocent students as "the way we amend the Constitution."

Even at the formal level, though, there is more than one way to play "the amendment game." Article V of the Constitution includes the possibility of a "Convention for proposing Amendments," triggered by "the Application of the Legislatures of two thirds of the several States." There can be little doubt that the Framers themselves believed that such conventions would occur, though, of course, they have so far been proved wrong. Still, "applications" to Congress for an Article V convention have been a recurrent feature of American political life. The most recent example, from the early 1980s, involved the Balanced Budget Amendment; probably the

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most important example, though, occurred early in this century when a reluctant Congress proposed the Seventeenth Amendment, requiring popular election of senators, because of its fear of the success of an "Application" movement among the states. So it would be a mistake to treat the Convention Clause of Article V as a dead letter.

It may be an understatement to say that we are now living in unusually interesting times. "First principles" of our scheme of government are being discussed in ways that have not been true for literally decades. One has the feeling that almost anything is possible. Surely one of these possibilities is that thirty-four of our states, increasingly disgusted by the vagaries of national political structures, will exercise their right to petition for a convention; should that occur, Congress will be under a duty to call one.

Such a convention could consider the merits of term limits and, perhaps, much else as well, for it is a much discussed question among constitutional lawyers whether an Article V convention could be any more limited in its reach than was the Philadelphia convention itself. *That* convention, of course, radically transformed American government. Speaker of the House Gingrich and many of his cohorts proudly proclaim themselves to be "revolutionaries." One way their revolution might well proceed is by calling a new convention and engaging in extended deliberation—no doubt covered by C-Span—on the adequacy of our historically generated institutional structures (including Article V itself) to our present circumstances.

If national political institutions continue to be gridlocked after the 1996 elections I would be quite surprised if the more radical Republicans do not embrace the possibility of an Article V convention and encourage the states to "take on" the status quo. The possibility of partisan-driven gridlock only underscores the futility of looking to Congress as a forum for serious reflection on the adequacy of our current constitutional scheme. But even if one could trust the members of the House and Senate to assess their own powers dispassionately, there are just too many competing responsibilities that preclude weeks- (probably months-) long discussions of fundamental issues. To expect Congress to add contemplation of our basic structures to its examination of medical care, environmental issues, defense—let alone the vagaries of Arkansas real estate in the early 1980s—is simply fanciful.

One need not be Gingrichian to believe that a structure designed in 1787 is more than a little imperfect for the next millennium. To be sure, liberals and conservatives would almost certainly have different ideas about the strengths and weaknesses of the present Constitution. Imagine, for example, the debates likely to ensue if the Second Amendment—and its "right to bear arms"—or the self-incrimination clause of the Fifth Amendment is brought forth for discussion. One could also relish the debates attending the meaning of private property—and the protection it is due—at the close of the twentieth century, not to mention the degrees of protection that should be granted "speech" that ranges from advocacy of violence to pornography to cigarette advertising. A battle royal could take place between those social democrats willing to advocate the adoption of European-style economic and social entitlements—to education, jobs, or child care—and enthusiasts of a minimal state eager to have it specified that any rights guaranteed by the Constitution are strictly "negative"—rights against governmental interference with protected liberties.

Even more important than these debates about rights, I suspect, would be the discussion of the structure of government itself. Assuming that bicameralism itself is a good idea, does it make any sense at all to allow the voters of Wyoming to offset the voters of California, the voters of Idaho to cancel out the voting population of New York? To ask the question, I think, is to answer it. A system that professes to be committed to one person-one vote can scarcely be comfortable defending the current United States Senate as anything other than an historical artifact.

Does the method by which we select a president should no one win a majority of the electoral vote—a distinct possibility in 1996—make any sense at all? For the non-cognoscenti, the method is that the House of Representatives, voting on a one-state–one-vote basis, selects the president by picking from the three highest winners of electoral votes; the Senate selects the vice-

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president by picking from the *two* highest receipients of electoral votes. This scheme is a constitutional crisis waiting to happen, as we may discover in January 1997 when no candidate obtains a majority of the Electoral College and the House of Representatives is asked to choose among, say, Dole, Clinton, and Powell, while the Senate chooses between Gore and Bradley (or Christine Whitman).

For those interested in term limits, perhaps the most compelling example at the national level of their desirability is the federal judiciary. In a recent *Constitutional Commentary* symposium on "Constitutional Stupidities," University of Texas professor Lucas Powe and Washington and Lee professor Lewis H. LaRue agreed that lifetime tenure for federal judges was the least defensible aspect of our current Constitution. As LaRue argues, no one today believes in the defense of judicial review offered by Alexander Hamilton, who argued that judges are "bound down by strict rules and precedents which serve to define and point out their duty in every particular case that comes before them." Instead, almost everyone agrees that judges are appointed by the ruling political coalition as a means of furthering its broad agenda. Moreover, as we saw with Reagan's and Bush's appointments especially, there is a perverse incentive to "appoint young" in order to assure the maximum term and, therefore, the possibility of maintaining a repudiated agenda in a new political era. It is only fair to suggest that Reagan and Bush might well have been encouraged in their practices by seeing how Justices Brennan and Marshall persisted in staying on the Court long after the peak of their intellectual powers (and the political appeal of the coalition that placed them in power). The best solution to this problem would be to limit Supreme Court justices (and perhaps federal judges generally) to single 18-year terms. The would provide more than enough protection for judicial independence.

Another crucial structural issue was raised by the recent approval, by majorities of both houses of Congress, of first the North American Free Trade Agreement and then the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs. Harvard law professor Laurence Tribe has argued eloquently in the *Harvard Law Review* that such bicameral majoritarian approval is a clear violation of the Constitution's Treaty Clause, which stands for the propositions first that *only* the Senate is empowered to ratify treaties and then that ratification requires a two-thirds vote. Yale's Bruce Ackerman does not dispute Tribe's analysis of the "original" 1787 Constitution; instead, he argues, the Constitution has been tacitly amended, in a distinctly non-Article V process, to allow majoritarian bicameral ratification of "agreements" that are functionally identical to "treaties," although presidents can, if they wish, adhere to the original scheme by calling something a treaty and submitting it to the Senate for ratification. But the point is that for Ackerman this is all basically a shell game, allowing presidents to do whatever is politically expedient in the given case. One reason for this development, says Ackerman, is the simple illegitimacy, for many contemporary Americans, of placing such decisions exclusively in a grotesquely malapportioned Senate. A new convention might well clarify whether we wish to stick with the Framers' Senate-only super-majoritarianism or frankly adopt, without subterfuge, the more modern scheme defended by Ackerman.

Any discussion of foreign affairs inevitably brings up the most awesome of all governmental powers, the power to go to war. Anyone reading the text of the Constitution can be forgiven for believing that it was Congress that was given the exclusive power "to declare War." Anyone reading the daily newspapers since World War II can be equally forgiven for believing that it is the president who in fact makes such decisions. One of the few moments of iron will demonstrated by President Clinton was his assertion that Congress in effect need not be consulted before the United States invaded Haiti, just as George Bush treated the decision to go to war in Iraq as basically his personal prerogative. Perhaps there are good reasons to place such power in the hands of the president, though I for one would like to hear them spelled out. If so, at least a certain measure of political controversy could be stilled by specifying that the president, as commander-in-chief, can order American troops into action at his or her absolute discretion.

I trust it is clear by now that few serious persons could really believe that the present distri-

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bution of power among our political institutions, as well as allocations of political rights against government, are so nearly perfect that we could not benefit from intense scrutiny and open debate about their adequacy for the United States in the next century. And I trust that it is clear as well that Congress can hardly add this task to its already overburdened plate of responsibilities. And, finally, I presume there is agreement that the only constitutionally proper alternative to congressional scrutiny is an Article V convention.

So now we come to the crux of the matter. Why is it that almost all "responsible" analysts, including law professors, editorial writers for elite newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, and, no doubt, most readers of *Dissent*, are appalled at the possibility of a new convention? Is the fact that the proponents of such a gathering would, at present, be drawn disproportionately from the Republican right enough to condemn it without more thought? Or is it possible that this would be simply one more example of the almost literally thoughtless commitment by the purported left to a political status quo that in fact well deserves serious critique?

It may be an example of what Yale law professor Jack Balkin calls "ideological drift" that the contemporary left seems so willing to wrap the Constitution in its embrace, while the right seems ever more willing to engage in radical critique of the status quo. An earlier generation of leftists and Progressives hardly had such views. That generation, after all, was educated by Charles Beard, Louis Boudin, and others to believe that the Constitution was an ill-disguised method of maintaining the prerogatives of the wealthy against the needs of the many. Or recall the sometimes savage critiques of the Constitution from Herbert Croly, who viewed it as a hindrance to achieving the full "promise of American life." More recently, Lloyd Cutler and others suggested in the early 1980s that some basic constitutional changes were highly desirable, but their calls fell on deaf ears, so eager were most Americans to celebrate the Bicentennial of the 1787 Constitution. Daniel Lazare argues in a forthcoming book, *The Frozen Republic:*

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Joseph M. Schwartz

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Why have radical political theorists, whose thinking inspired mass movements for democracy, been so suspicious of political plurality? According to Joseph Schwartz, their doubts were involved with an effort to transcend politics. Radical thinkers sought a comprehensive set of "true human interests" that would completely abolish political strife. In extensive analyses of Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Lenin, and Arendt, Schwartz seeks to mediate the radical critique of democratic capitalist societies with the concern for pluralism evidenced in both liberal and postmodern thought.

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America and its Immovable Constitution, that we would be well rid of a structure of governance that he, following Harvard's Samuel P. Huntington, traces back to Tudor England—a structure that the British themselves were wise enough to reject in favor of strong parliamentary governance. It remains to be seen if his polemic can avoid rapid shipment to the remainder shelf.

Most of what passes for the contemporary left seems willing to treat the Constitution as sacred, lamenting only the demise of the epic days of the Warren Court. It seems altogether predictable that the *American Prospect*, a leading journal of the establishment left, would publish in its Fall 1995 issue an article, "Constitutional Amendmentitis," by Stanford Professor of Law Kathleen M. Sullivan. To be sure, she rejects "[c]onstitutional idolatry" as "an attractive organizing principle." That being said, she nonetheless denounces the increasing frequency with which Congress is considering constitutional amendment. "Keeping amendment relatively infrequent," says Sullivan, "preserves public confidence in the stability of the basic constitutional structure." As she concedes, she rejects Jefferson's call for "a little rebellion now and then" in favor of Madison's desire to avoid any such rebellions.

Part of what drives this embrace of status-quo constituonalism, no doubt, is undoubtedly sheer terror of the political turmoil that might be engendered by a new convention. Some of this terror may be well founded: Article V is spectacularly uninformative as to the most basic mechanics of a convention. (How, for example, would delegates be selected? How many delegates would each state receive? What would the voting rules of the convention be? Would approval of a given proposal require a majority [or super-majority] vote of the delegates as individuals, as in the current House of Representatives, or voting on a state-by-state basis, as at Philadelphia? And what if the convention proposed ratification by a national referendum rather than by the cumbersome—and almost undoubtedly fatal, should the changes in fact be significant—process of state approval set out by Article V? Any lawyer who drafted Article V as part of an ordinary business contract would be justifiably deemed incompetent, given the number of important questions it leaves open.)

Whatever the problems posed by a convention, it seems implausible to explain the caution exhibited by most "responsible" people, including most leaders of the contemporary left, simply by reference to them. More fundamental is the rejection, even (or especially) by the left, of what Michael Kazin, in his recent book *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, has described as the belief—the joint product of the "pietistic impulse issuing from the Protestant Reformation" and "the secular faith of the Enlightenment"—that "ordinary people could think and act rationally, more rationally, in fact, than their ancestral overlords." Today it is those identified with the radical right who express such faith, whether or not they are hypocritical in doing so; too much of the left, whatever its claims of speaking *for* the people, seems afraid *of* them.

As the owl of Minerva flies all too far away from the Great Society (or even from what now appear the progressive days of the Nixon administration), it seems increasingly clear that one of the great mistakes of many "progressives" was to place far too much faith in courts and judges as our new "overlords." To be sure, their claim to power was professional rather than ancestral, but judges were as vulnerable as earlier aristocrats once they were exposed, as was inevitable, as latter-day Wizards of Oz, making claims in behalf of "the Constitution" that simply did not persuade. Too often during this period, liberal-leftists wrote op-ed pieces in behalf of "the rule of law" while the populist right listened to Joe Hill's injunction not to mourn but to organize.

Use it or lose it, goes a common maxim. Perhaps it should be applied to organizing skills and other expressions of confidence in one's fellow citizens. If we fear confronting them with our own ideas about constitutional government—and prefer to take refuge instead in the occasional appointments by Democratic presidents of judges like Ruth Ginsburg or Stephen Breyer—then further victories for the right become inevitable. Some right-wing victories can be explained as the result of big money, but this scarcely seems a plausible account, say, of the success of the anti-abortion movement or the passionate desire to place

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term limits on political officials. More likely is that the right has been willing to engage in the hard work of democratic politics, including a willingness to discuss basic constitutional issues and even to suggest basic constitutional changes.

If my political analysis is right, we may find ourselves facing a mass movement for a new constitutional convention in the relatively near future. Should that occur, the left should think of yet another popular maxim: if you have a lemon, make some lemonade. Whatever the sour taste generated by the particular rightists behind a convention movement, the left still has the opportunity to make lemonade if it recognizes the deep merit of such a convention and begins a genuine process of engagement with the citizenry about what sort of government We the People should ordain for the next millennium.

Andrew J. Polsky

GIVING BUSINESS THE BUSINESS

After the 1994 election, two kinds of stories began to appear describing relations between the new Republican congressional majority and business groups. One kind depicted business leaders licking their chops, anticipating tax relief and relaxed regulation. As the GOP majority assumed power early in 1995, accounts in this vein told of business representatives moving at will within the corridors of power, brazenly rewriting statutes in their favor. The second type of article painted a different picture. It portrayed business leaders and lobbyists as anxious about the new political order created by the election. Business leaders voiced fears that Republican plans, especially those designed to reduce the deficit, cut taxes, and slash corporate subsidies, put the long-term health of the economy at risk. Concerns were also expressed, usually anonymously, over the political tactics employed by Republican leaders. Speaker Newt Gingrich, minority whip Tom DeLay, and others played hardball, bullying business representatives and demanding that they sever all ties to the Democrats.

Although the two kinds of stories seem at odds, both capture facets of how business has responded to the Republican triumph. The contrasts reflect the complexities of the political position of American business and the strategic moves of the new Republican leadership. Apart from a few brief intervals, American business has always been divided in its politics. Some corporate sectors have accustomed themselves to close working relations with the state, and have often found it prudent to support the Democratic party. For their part, the new Republican leaders have made it clear they intend to alter the political terrain in such a way as to force corporate leaders to rethink their political habits. At stake for the Republicans is nothing less than the final consolidation of the political regime Ronald Reagan began to construct in 1980. Their approach is designed to drive a wedge between business and the Democrats and to incorporate autonomous business elements into the dominant GOP coalition.

One period when American business displayed striking political unity came in the late 1970s and early 1980s, during the years before Ronald Reagan's first presidential victory and for a short time thereafter. As other analysts have noted, the increase in consumer, environmental, and workplace regulation during the early and mid-1970s provoked a strong reaction on the part of all business sectors, and both large and small businesses mobilized their financial wherewithal to support candidates dedicated to rolling back the regulatory state. The cash helped enormously

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in securing a Republican majority in the U.S. Senate in the 1980 elections, giving Reagan a vital legislative base of support.

In short order, though, the effects of Reaganite policies and political circumstances combined to fracture the business community's united front. Although some business sectors remained eager proponents of the Republican agenda, others lost enthusiasm for it. Leaders of major corporations differed with the Reagan administration over mounting budget deficits, trade policies, tax simplification, and a host of other matters. Small business, by contrast, continued to support such conservative themes as opposition to all tax increases and hostility to regulation. Meanwhile, the Reaganite triumph remained incomplete in political terms, with the Democrats retaining control of the House and regaining a Senate majority after 1986. Guided by House majority whip Tony Coelho, the Democrats also made a strong bid for business support, and centrist and conservative elements in the party worked diligently to refashion the party image and reinforce ties to business.

By the late 1980s, American politics had reached a stalemate, and business firms split over how to respond. Political scientist Cathie Jo Martin has noted that divided government encouraged divided business. Once the Democrats reestablished their control over the Senate, the heads of major corporations and lobbyists for large firms came to appreciate that they would have to conduct their political business with both parties. They were sensitive in particular to the need to maintain good access to Democratic leaders and committee chairs. To borrow a term coined by Theda Skocpol, we might speak of these firms as "state-broken"—they accept that their market environment is constructed in Washington and take prudent political steps to secure their future. Large companies thus made regular campaign contributions through political action committees (PACs) to Democratic and Republican incumbents alike. By contrast, entrepreneurs and smaller businesses remained hostile to the state and to the politicians who defended it. These business elements forged close ties to the vocal minority of conservative House Republicans led by Newt Gingrich.

The divisions within the ranks of business became more pronounced after Bill Clinton's victory in 1992. During the 1992 campaign he secured the support of a number of corporate heads in high technology fields. Once in office Clinton pursued several policies designed to woo major corporate and financial actors—a conservative plan to close the deficit, the North American Free Trade Agreement, subsidies for new technology under the auspices of the Commerce and Defense Departments, and aggressive promotion of exports. Continued Democratic control of Congress also paid dividends for the party in the form of increased "soft money" corporate contributions. Shortly before the 1994 election, the *New York Times* reported that many large firms that had given heavily to the Republican congressional campaign committees in 1992 had reversed their pattern of political contributions to favor the Democrats. This was especially true of energy, telecommunications, agriculture, and banking and finance interests.

But if some business sectors made their peace with Democratic power holders, others became ever more alienated. Most business firms, of course, could not count on special congressional or executive dispensations. Executives from smaller businesses condemned government as an overweening presence that imposes excessive tax burdens and unwelcome additional costs (affirmative action compliance rules, baffling environmental standards, excessive occupational safety regulations, and the like). For these companies, inside political access was not the issue. They were steadfast supporters of lower taxes, reduced regulation, and increased respect for entrepreneurship. Disenchanted with the reigning political system, smaller firms threw their weight behind Republican populist-conservative candidates, and a growing number of entrepreneurs decided to enter politics themselves.

The Republican triumph in the 1994 congressional elections left small businesses delighted and firms linked to the old Democratic establishment scrambling to catch up. Certain features of the Republican "Contract With America" were designed to appeal to entrepreneurs and smaller companies—reduced regulatory burdens, a small-business deduction for equipment and

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inventory, and an increased estate-tax exemption, to name just a few. Large corporations, caught on the wrong foot, quickly began to play "catching the late train," a familiar Washington political game that finds lobbyists who had backed losing incumbents helping successful challengers retire their campaign debt. By the old rules of the game, this should have sufficed to mend fences and assure corporate representatives of open access to the new congressional power brokers.

Here, though, the story gets more interesting, for incoming Speaker Gingrich and his allies made it clear that they intended to rewrite the rules. Indeed, Gingrich had warned business PACs before the election that their support for the Democrats would leave them frozen out of the picture. Soon after the GOP majority assumed power, corporate lobbyists started to report finding Republican members' doors closed if their group had contributed to Democratic losers or had too many former Democratic officials on the payroll. Most strikingly, lobbyists were told that the old practice of contributing to both parties had to stop: the new GOP leadership insisted on being the sole beneficiary of PAC largess.

However heavy-handed it may be, this approach suggests that House Republicans recognize that their 1994 gains give them the opportunity to complete unfinished political business dating back to the 1980 election. If historical patterns had held true then, the Republicans would have emerged as the undisputed majority party, ready to establish a new political regime that would dominate American politics. Instead, they found themselves blocked by congressional Democrats. Now a cadre of young Republican congressional leaders believe they have been presented with the chance to place the GOP coalition in an unassailable position. They propose to choke off a key source of funds for the Democrats, leaving them far behind in a campaign arena dominated by expensive media. More than that, the Republicans seek to bring into their ruling coalition important corporate elites that had found it advantageous to balance between the two parties throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s.

It takes more than arm-twisting to draw such elites into a regime. Intimidation alone, as the Democrats cheerfully predicted, would backfire on their opponents. The Republicans have had to offer positive inducements to secure the support of large corporations.

This has presented a challenge for the GOP: although the Gingrich conservatives desire broad corporate support, their natural base lies with small business. The group of Republicans that seized center stage after the 1994 election consists of self-styled allies of Main Street rather than Wall Street. Nearly half the newly elected Republicans in Congress have owned or operated their own businesses before coming to Capitol Hill. Many of them are free-enterprise zealots who mistrust big business as much as big government (and, in fact, see little difference between the two). In spirit, the Republican House majority evokes the nineteenth-century Jacksonian opposition to any special privileges created by the state. Many of the public subsidies and tax benefits that tied major corporations to the previous political order are anathema to the new generation of GOP leaders. They also have faced the task of winning over older Republican lawmakers, very influential in the Senate, who prospered within that order by behaving like their Democratic counterparts—targeting benefits to friendly firms and industries.

On the other hand, Republican populist-conservatives can count on certain advantages as they seek to win over big business. Many younger corporate leaders are very sympathetic to the Republican program. Their predecessors rose to influence amid a corporate culture that at least tolerated state economic management. But the emerging business leadership has risen through the corporate ranks over the past twenty years, a time of mounting skepticism about government in all business circles. This new corporate leadership has begun to discover its public voice in organizations like the Business Leadership Council.

More important, business interests in public policies are contingent upon the choices that lawmakers frame for the private sector. In the past large firms were "statist" because the political order offered direct government subsidies and

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regulations that favored them over their competitors. But the Republican House leaders and freshmen recognize that they can redefine the agenda to present to big business another set of choices. Policies like tort liability reform, protection against shareholder suits, an end to the alternative minimum tax, and generous "neutral cost recovery" depreciation rules promise more to large firms than they would give up with the elimination of "corporate welfare."

The Republicans pursued this approach with vigor during the first half of 1995. Early predictions of a clash between Main Street business and corporate America over issues like export subsidies and affirmative action have proven to be overblown. Shrewdly, the House GOP leaders moved fast to pass the elements of the "Contract With America" that appealed to small business and large firms alike. Matters became more dicey when House Republicans, needing savings to offset their tax cut, found it necessary to attack the Commerce Department and corporate subsidies. The Clinton administration expected its corporate backers to rally behind technology and export support programs. To its dismay, corporate leaders remained silent, fearful of Republican retaliation and content with the gains from other parts of the Republican package. For example, although automakers had been the direct recipients of a $100 million subsidy to develop next-generation technology, they stood by as this program was slashed because they would gain far more from tort liability reform. This change and others like a reduced capital-gains tax, moreover, have done much to please the Republican populists' small-business constituency.

It is too soon to know how well intimidation and inducement will pay off politically for the Gingrich Republicans. Whether the policy changes survive negotiations with the Senate and a possible presidential veto remains to be seen. Even so, businesses report that government regulators have gotten the message and started to back off threats to impose fines for violations or initiate litigation.

As for the Democrats, they face the depressing prospect that they will be marginalized as the minority party by an increasingly powerful Republican regime. Progressive critics of the Coelho strategy of courting business dollars warned during the 1980s that the appeal to business would alienate the Democrats's core liberal, labor, and minority constituencies and leave the party dependent upon unreliable corporate donors. In 1994 the Democratic congressional majority debated campaign finance reforms that might have checked the dominance of corporate PACs in congressional elections. Confident that their own corporate money supply was endless, the Democrats frittered away the opportunity. Now Newt Gingrich and friends seem likely to make sure the Democrats won't get another chance anytime soon.

To Our Contributors

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(2) Please don't write to ask whether we're interested in such and such an article—it makes for useless correspondence. Look at our last few issues to see if your idea fits in. Or take a chance and send us your article. We will not consider manuscripts submitted simultaneously to several publications.

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(4) Notes and footnotes should also be typed double-spaced, on a *separate* sheet. As we're not an academic journal, we prefer that they, wherever possible, be dropped altogether or worked into the text.

(5) We're usually quick in giving editorial decisions. If there's a delay, it's because a few editors are reading your article.

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THE EDITORS □

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Nicolaus Mills

LIFEBOAT ETHICS AND IMMIGRATION FEARS

In *The Great Gatsby* F. Scott Fitzgerald introduces us to the nativism that was so much a part of 1920s culture. "The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged," Tom Buchanan tells the narrator, Nick Carraway. "It's all scientific stuff, it's been proved."

An embarrassed Nick says nothing. But Fitzgerald doesn't let Tom's remarks (which parallel Calvin Coolidge's 1921 observation, "Biological laws tell us . . . Nordics propogate themselves successfully. With other races, the outcome shows deterioration on both sides") go unchallenged. As soon as Tom stops speaking, his wife, Daisy, Nick's cousin, answers him back. "Tom's getting very profound," she observes sarcastically. "We've got to beat them down," she adds with a wink that summarizes her opinion of Tom's fears.

It is a putdown that works in *The Great Gatsby.* Tom Buchanan doesn't talk about race or immigration again. But seventy years later his fears are alive and well in America. To see them in action, we need look no further than Peter Brimelow's 1995 polemic *Alien Nation: Common Sense About America's Immigration Disaster.* For the English-born Brimelow, a senior editor at *Forbes*, the current mass immigration from predominantly non-European countries threatens not only "the racial hegemony of white Americans" but the ethnic balance responsible for our social cohesion as a nation. Continued unchecked immigration, Brimelow argues, promises to put America in the same position the Western Roman Empire faced during the fifth century when it was overrun by the Germanic tribes of Europe.

If he were no more than a lone voice defending the WASP values Tom Buchanan and Calvin Coolidge saw threatened in the 1920s, Peter Brimelow would be an interesting case. But in his belief that the time has come for a halt in immigration to America, Brimelow is no mere holdover from the Gatsby era, when nativist tracts like Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* and Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color* were respectable reading. Brimelow speaks for an America that has become increasingly worried about the arrival of a million-plus immigrants annually to its shores and increasingly cynical about the arguments for continuing immigration at that rate.

The surveys in which a majority of the public speaks favorably about past immigration and critically about current immigration (4.5 million between 1990 and 1994) only begin to tell the story. What is really at work these days in the immigration backlash and the culture of meanness it has helped foster is more than a fear of newcomers. It is a lifeboat ethics that says we aren't making it as a nation and that taking on even more people can only make our problems worse. The opponents of immigration now include trade unionists who see their collective bargaining power being weakened still further, archconservatives who want to put troops on our border with Mexico, congressional representatives who favor a computer registry with the names of everyone eligible to work in the United States, Zero-Population Growth advocates frightened by Census Bureau estimates that our population in 2050 will be eighty-two million greater than it would have been if immigration had ended in 1991, and black workers—73 percent of whom believe, according to a 1992 *Busi-*

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ness Week/Harris poll, that businesses would rather hire immigrants than African Americans.

The most dramatic example of such anti-immigrant fears overwhelming all other considerations and changing the political climate occurred in California during the 1994 midterm elections, when voters were presented with Proposition 187, an initiative designed to cut virtually all state aid, except emergency hospital care, to illegal aliens. In a state in which government officials put the cost to taxpayers of illegal aliens and their U. S. born children at $3 billion annually—$1.1 billion in education, $950 million in health care, and $500 million each in welfare and prison costs—the questions raised by Proposition 187 were in themselves crucial. But as the debate over Proposition 187 heated up, the distinctions it drew between legal and illegal immigrants became increasingly marginal. Long before the November elections, what Proposition 187 was really about was signaled by its supporters when they began calling it the S.O.S. (Save our State) initiative.

The literature handed out along with the initiative was even blunter in its appeals to resentment and its reluctance to concede that immigrants coming to California were driven by a sense of desperation and a willingness to take almost any job. "While our own citizens and legal residents go wanting, those who choose to enter our country ILLEGALLY get royal treatment at the expense of the California taxpayer," one ballot description read. Another hammered home the laziness of the newcomers. "Welfare, medical, and educational benefits are the magnets that draw ILLEGAL ALIENS," it declared. "WE CAN STOP THE ILLEGAL ALIEN INVASION NOW." Missing was any notion that today's immigrants might resemble those of the past in their character and ambition. As a television commercial argued, the only proper way for a struggling Californian to look on an illegal immigrant was as a leech: "Three hundred thousand illegal immigrant children in public schools. . . and they keep coming. It's unfair when people like you are working hard," the voiceover in one of the governor's ads reminded voters.

For Governor Pete Wilson, seemingly headed for defeat when the election began, a pro-Proposition 187 stance (combined with a recommendation that all Californians be required to carry I.D. cards when applying for a job or a government benefit) was enough to provide the basis for a come-from-behind victory over popular Secretary of State Kathleen Brown. But in a state that voted for Proposition 187 by a 3-to-2 margin, it was not just anxious white voters who took Wilson seriously. As a *Los Angeles Times* exit poll showed, Proposition 187 got 47 percent of the black vote, 47 percent of the Asian vote, and 23 percent of the Latino vote.

Wilson was not, moreover, alone among California politicians. Long before the 1994 elections, California officials at all levels made a point of calling for tougher sanctions on immigrants. Senator Dianne Feinstein argued for more Border Patrol agents and a $1-per-person border-crossing fee to pay for them. Senator Barbara Boxer advocated using the National Guard to help with Border Patrol work and increasing the penalties for the forgery of immigration documents. Even liberal politicians understood that in the California of the 1990s, being called soft on immigration was the equivalent of being called soft on communism during the cold war.

As the 1990s have progressed, California's mood has become the nation's. A 1993 Yankelovich poll reflects the depth of the resentment. Sixty-four percent of those polled think most immigrants enter the United States illegally, 64 percent believe they take jobs from Americans, and 59 percent believe they add to the crime problem. Equally important, voters want the government to take steps to combat immigration. Seventy-three percent of the nation want strict limits on immigration, 50 percent want all U.S. citizens to be required to carry a national I.D. card, and 65 percent want the government to spend more money to tighten the border between the United States and Mexico.

The result is that we have crossed a threshold on what can be said in public about the dangers of immigration. In *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992,* her one-woman play about the Los Angeles riots, Anna Deveare Smith quotes Paul Parker, the chairman of the Free the LA Four Plus Defense Committee, on the virtue of burning down Korean stores. "The Koreans was like the Jews in the day and we put them in check," Parker

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gleefully tells Smith. Such open viciousness toward immigrants remains unacceptable, but in the 1990s it is where the boundary lies. The popular rock group Guns N' Roses didn't hurt itself with fans when it cut a record that declared

> Immigrants and faggots
> They make no sense to me
> They come to our country—
> And think they'll do as they please
> Like start some mini-Iran
> Or spread some fuckin' disease

Nor have archconservatives like Thomas Fleming, the editor of *Chronicles,* the Rockford Institute's monthly magazine, had to pay a political price for saying, "More fruit pickers we do not need. Cut off the welfare payments and we shall be surprised at how many agricultural workers are living right now in Chicago and New York. One doesn't wish to be unkind, but cultural pluralism is not the most attractive legacy we can leave to our children."

What is most revealing about the anti-immigrant mood is, however, the assumptions that have come to dominate mainstream discussion. "We must not—we will not—surrender our borders to those who wish to exploit our history of compassion and justice," President Clinton declared in the summer of 1993 when he sent before Congress a $172.5 million proposal to beef up the Border Patrol and crack down on visa fraud and false asylum claims. By 1994, when the Senate and the House began debating proposals to bar legal immigrants from federal programs ranging from Medicaid to school lunches, the rhetoric had escalated to the point where Clinton's remarks of a year earlier seemed conciliatory.

At the core of the Congressional debate were not only the doubts about immigration that the Yankelovich poll of 1993 had picked up but a sense that the immigrants of today are unequal to those of the past and should be judged accordingly. Among leading Republicans it was now all right to speak of new immigrants with the same suspicion once reserved for welfare recipients. In insisting that Congress was right to exclude immigrants from a series of welfare benefits, Republican E. Clay Shaw of Florida pointed out that the legislators were only following past patterns. "This is not a departure from traditional immigration policy," Shaw declared, "because we have always required that people come here because they can get ahead through hard work, not because they can go on welfare. "Republican Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania was even harsher: "In part this is a fund-raising measure," Santorum observed of the Republican welfare bill, "but if you look at the targets of the proposed cuts, we are saying that the kind of immigrants we want are people who will take responsibility for themselves and not rely on the federal government."

Such a backlash was unforeseen by those responsible for liberalizing America's immigration laws three decades ago. In 1965, when the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments that led to the mass immigration of the last decade and a half were enacted, the amendments' supporters assumed that a new era of social justice was beginning. For the previous forty-one years, immigration to America had been reduced dramatically by the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. Passed at a time when anti-immigration fever was running high, the Immigration Act of 1924 set a yearly limit of 150,000 on immigrants from outside the Western Hemisphere and then divided the 150,000 into quotas based on a country's share of the total American population of 1920. The national-origins system favored the descendants of those who had been here the longest—the British and Northern Europeans.

When a *Los Angeles Times* headline hailed the 1924 law as a "Nordic Victory," it was not mistaken. Chinese, as a result of extensions of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (it would not be repealed until 1943) were already barred, and Japanese, as a result of a provision in the 1924 act, were also effectively kept out. The immigration tide that from 1880 to 1920 brought 23.5 million people to America was over. Between 1920 and 1930 immigration dropped to just over four million. In the Great Depression years of the 1930s it was barely half a million, and in the 1940s, despite special legislation that paved the way for hundreds of thousands of displaced World War II refugees to come to America, immigration only reached a million.

The McCarran-Walter Immigration and Na-

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tionality Act of 1952 did little to change this pattern. Passed over the veto of President Harry Truman, who wanted a more liberal immigration law, the McCarran-Walter Act retained most of the quota preferences of 1924. Asians could now enter America as immigrants, but their numbers, like those of Southern Europeans, were kept low. From 1951 to 1960, only 2.5 million immigrants came to the United States.

The amendments of 1965 were designed to undo this pattern. Enacted at the peak of the civil rights revolution, they reflected the optimism of the Great Society and the views of the coalition of Jews, Catholics, and liberals who had fought for years against the biases of the 1924 law. The new amendments put a limit on immigration from the Western Hemisphere for the first time, but in every other respect they were revolutionary. The new law abandoned all efforts to distinguish among immigrants on the basis of their race or their historical links to America. Up to twenty thousand people could come in any year from a single nation. The dominating principle was now family reunification. Eighty percent of the numerically limited visas were for close relatives of American citizens or residents.

In proposing the new legislation, President John F. Kennedy emphasized the importance of doing away with the old quota system. "It neither satisfies a national need nor accomplishes an international purpose," he declared. "In an age of interdependence among nations, such a system is an anachronism, for it discriminates among applicants for admission to the United States on the basis of accident of birth."

Two years later at the Liberty Island signing ceremony for the bill, Lyndon Johnson returned to the same themes in language reminiscent of that which he had used in signing the Voting Rights Act months earlier. The new immigration bill, the President said, repairs "a deep and painful flaw in the fabric of American justice. It corrects a cruel and enduring wrong in the conduct of the American nation."

For the president and the immigration bill's supporters, there was, however, a second reason for optimism. They had, they thought, achieved a legislative victory that would not cause them future political problems. "The bill that we sign today is not a revolutionary bill," the president emphasized in his signing ceremony speech. "It does not affect the lives of millions. It will not reshape the structure of our daily lives, or really add importantly to either our wealth or power." Senator Edward Kennedy, the bill's floor manager, was equally sanguine about its future. "Our cities will not be flooded with a million immigrants annually. Under the proposed bill the present level of immigration remains substantially the same," he told critics. His brother Robert, while attorney general, was also upbeat, assuring a House Subcommittee worried over an influx of Asian immigrants, that their number "would be approximately five thousand a year" at the start and then drop off to a much lower figure.

The Johnson administration and the Kennedys failed to anticipate the consequences that would follow from a loophole in the 1965 law, which allowed the parents, spouse, and minor children of any adult American citizen to enter the country *without* being subject to numerical restrictions. As Asian and Latin immigrants with large extended families replaced European immigrants, the immigration multiplier—the number of admittances attributable to one immigrant—began to rise dramatically. The fifth preference of the new law, one that placed brothers and sisters high on the quota list, accelerated the process still more. Between 1971 and 1980, 4.5 million immigrants were admitted to the United States. Then in the 1980s the numbers climbed to a peak they had not reached since the turn of the century, and since then, our current immigration pattern of a million or more immigrants per year has become the norm.

It was not, however, only the size and scope of contemporary immigration that the supporters of the 1965 amendments failed to anticipate. They also failed to anticipate the problems that immigration would pose for an America no longer shaped by the prosperity of the 1960s.

In no area has this difference been more dramatic than that of affirmative action. In 1965, the year the Immigration and Nationality Amendments became law, there was no sense that newcomers to America might qualify for affirmative action. The aim of the Civil Rights Act

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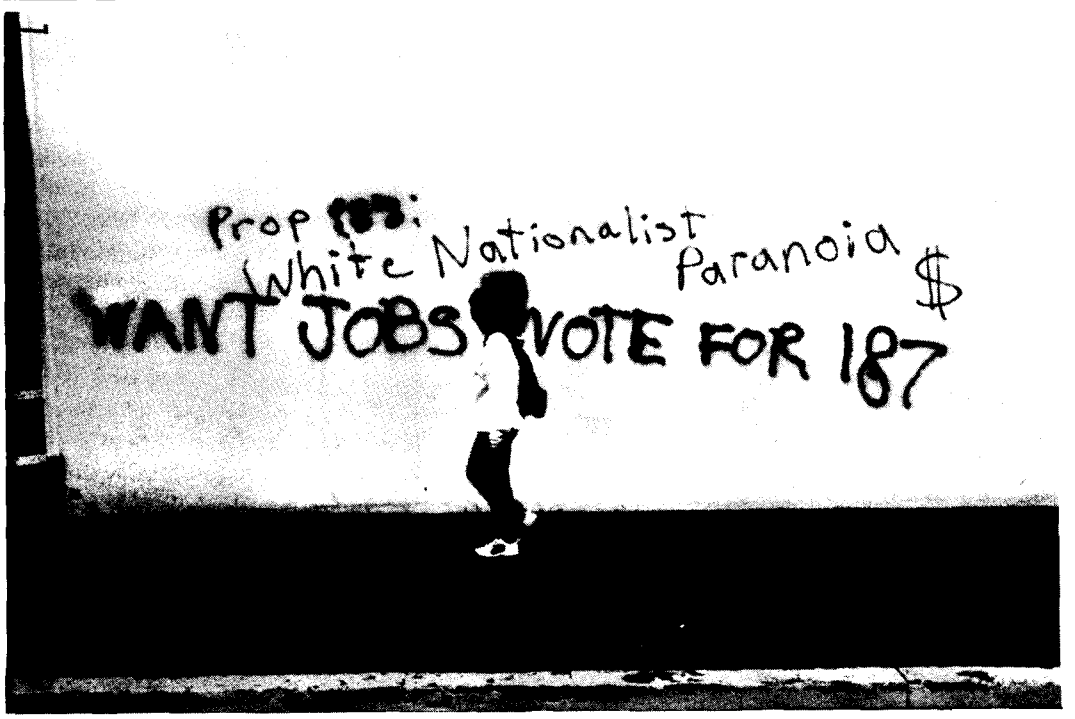
of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was to undo legalized racism. The aim of affirmative action as it was understood in 1965 was to make sure that those who had been hurt by Jim Crow were in a position to compete on the new level playing field that had been created. As Lyndon Johnson put it in a speech at Howard University's 1965 commencement, "You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race and then say, 'You are free to compete with all others' and still justly believe you have been completely fair."

In the 1990s all that has changed. It is not only the historic victims of racial and sexual discrimination who qualify for affirmative action. So do recent immigrants. The question is, should they? In a tight economy in which affirmative action is increasingly a zero-sum game, the competition for affirmative action slots has become fierce—especially among blacks and Latinos—and with the Supreme Court narrowing the scope of affirmative action still further with its 1995 *Adarand* decision, the immigrant question isn't only a practical one. It is also one of principle. It is not clear on what basis recent minority immigrants have a claim on benefits designed for those who have been the historic victims of American injustice. But as the law now operates, its message is that membership in a designated group, rather than actual victimization, entitles any entrant to America to special benefits.

Similar concerns arise with regard to citizenship and birth on American soil. A classic case emerged in 1995 when Immigration and Naturalization Service agents arrested a group of midwives along the Rio Grande border in Texas for a birth-certificate scam in which they charged Mexican mothers $800 to $1,200 for making up documents saying that their children were born in America and were therefore American citizens, eligible for a variety of benefits from AFDC payments to the eventual right to obtain legal residency for their parents. The scam itself gave the INS the basis for a clear line of prosecution, but what it also revealed was how easily U.S. immigration law can be circumvented.

Under U.S. law Mexican residents can easily obtain temporary visas for shopping or visiting family provided they do not travel more than



Alain McLaughlin/IMPACT VISUALS

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twenty-five miles across the border. All a pregnant Mexican woman need do is take a taxi across the international bridge and legally give birth in Texas to a U.S. citizen. If the mother is indigent, the government will even pay for her hospitalization and medical care. In the Rio Grande area of Texas as well as in California, this has meant thousands of such "American" babies being born each year.

A generous law has become an invitation for exploitation. Even a mother who is here illegally is rewarded with citizenship for her child and residence for herself and her family if she gives birth on American soil.

At the other end of the age scale, the problems are just as great. The Supplemental Security Income program was established in 1972 to help elderly retirees who did not in their lifetimes earn enough under Social Security to support themselves after they stopped working. With elderly immigrants, particularly those brought over by their children at an advanced age, SSI has taken on a very different quality. It has become a basic, rather than a supplemental, retirement program for men and women who never worked or worked for only a year or two in America. Just 10 percent of elderly United States citizens are enrolled in SSI. By contrast more than a quarter of all immigrants over the age of sixty-five now receive SSI, at a cost of $2 billion annually, and their numbers are growing. In just a decade they have increased fivefold, from 91,900 in 1982 to 440,000 today.

At what point does it make sense to say that these elderly new arrivals should not receive SSI? For the 20 percent living in families with incomes of $50,000 a year, the cutoff is clear. But there are grounds for being concerned about others as well and fearing that taxpayers are being asked to compensate for a lifetime of substandard income in a foreign country.

Finally, there is the question of illegal immigrants and the education of their children. Under the terms of the Supreme Court's 1982 decision in *Plyer v. Doe*, the individual states are obliged to pay for the education of these children. Speaking for the Court's 5-to-4 majority, Justice William Brennan held, "There is no evidence in the record suggesting that illegal entrants pose any significant burden on the State's economy. To the contrary, the available evidence suggests that illegal aliens underutilize public services, while contributing their labor to the local economy and tax money to the state." A decade later, Justice Brennan's economic analysis no longer applies. In 1994 the Urban Institute estimated that it cost the seven states with the highest number of immigrants $3.1 billion to educate 641,000 undocumented children, and in California the numbers were particularly high, with the state being forced to educate an estimated 300,000.

But equally problematic these days is the larger issue of whether there are constitutional grounds for insisting, as the Court did, that educating the children of illegal aliens is required so as to avoid penalizing minors for the wrongdoing of the adults responsible for them. If such logic is to be the standard, why, as legal scholar Jeffrey Rosen argues, stop at education? Does not any limit on benefits for children of illegal aliens penalize them for the sins of their parents? In turn does not *Plyer v. Doe* as it stands invite wholesale violation of the law by illegal immigrant parents concerned with helping their children get a better start in life?

The result is that thirty years after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965 it has become very difficult, once one moves beyond the realm of scapegoating, to distinguish between the opponents of immigration whose arguments deserve to be heard and those whose objections are rooted in nativism. The former often provide cover for the latter.

To make matters worse, there is the stance taken on behalf of immigration by its conservative defenders. In the 1990s they have become its most influential proponents, and they have ensured that the immigration debate will continue to be a divisive one for years to come. At the core of their arguments is not a concern for those the poet Emma Lazarus described as "huddled masses yearning to be free" but the very opposite—a belief that by turning to immigrants we can bypass the worst problems the underclass poses to the economy.

This view is epitomized by Linda Chavez's 1995 *Commentary* essay "What To Do About Im-

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migration." Chavez, the head of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights during the Reagan years and currently president of the Center for Equal Opportunity, begins her essay by celebrating the accomplishments of recent immigrants. They have "transformed urban America over the last decade, from Korean grocers in New York, to Salvadoran busboys and janitors in Washington, Mexican babysitters and construction workers in Los Angeles, Cambodian doughnut shop owners in Long Beach, Haitian cooks in Miami, Russian taxi drivers in Philadelphia, and Filipino nurses and Indian doctors in public hospitals practically everywhere," Chavez writes. But for Chavez and the conservatives, it is not just the immigrants' successes that are important. It is that they have triumphed while long-term inner-city residents continue to fail. As Peter Salins of the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research puts it, "Wherever they have settled, immigrants have reclaimed inner-city neighborhoods that had fallen into a state of advanced decay."

For the conservatives, this comparison suggests that the revival of our inner cities now depends on immigrants. "The contrast between the immigrant poor and the American underclass is especially striking," Chavez goes on to argue. "In cities like Los Angeles and Washington, where American blacks and Latino immigrants inhabit the same poor neighborhoods, the despair of the former seems all the more intense by comparison to the striving of the latter—as if one group had given up on America even as the other was proving the continued existence of opportunity."

Missing from Chavez's essay and the conservative defense of immigration is any sense that something is wrong when newcomers can find the wherewithal and energy to revitalize a neighborhood that those born into it have given up on. What is the future of an "American underclass" unable to come up with the cash or credit to open stores of their own? Are they to be pushed to still more neglected neighborhoods? Is there any obligation to help them? Chavez and the pro-immigration conservatives of the nineties never say. But at a time when they are doing their best to keep down the minimum wage and reduce welfare, their silence speaks volumes. It assumes that we are collectively better off if an inner-city neighborhood is "reclaimed"—even if that means its native-born inhabitants are made still more irrelevant to the economy around them.

Among pro-immigration conservatives, the same kind of thinking is true on an even grander scale when it comes to jobs. Michael Lind is not guilty of hyperbole when he charges, "From the point of view of business-class conservatives, the labor supply can never be too large and wages too low." "We propose a five-word constitutional amendment: There shall be open borders," the *Wall Street Journal* has declared. Immigrants, the conservative argument goes, promise a virtually painless cure for everything from the aging of our work force to our short-term labor shortages.

For high-tech industries what this means, Ron K. Unz, the CEO of Wall Street Analytics, writes in the Heritage Foundation's *Policy Review*, is skilled labor they don't have to train. "Silicon Valley, home to my own software company, is absolutely dependent upon immigrant professionals to maintain its technological edge," Unz notes. "A third of all the engineers and microchip designers here are foreign born, and if they left or their future inflow were cut off, America's computer industry would probably go with them."

But what really rouses Unz's enthusiasm and that of most pro-immigration conservatives is the idea that newcomers will do—cheaply and efficiently—what native American workers will not. Chavez puts the matter very delicately when she writes, "As they have always done, immigrants still take the difficult, often dirty, low-paying, thankless jobs that other Americans shun." Unz and most pro-immigration conservatives are more candid in talking about the kind of work immigrants will do. "In Los Angeles, the vast majority of hotel and restaurant employees are hardworking Hispanic immigrants, most here illegally, and anyone who believes that these unpleasant jobs would otherwise be filled by native-born blacks or whites is living in a fantasy world," Unz writes. "The same applies to nearly all the traditional lower-rung working-class jobs in Southern California, including the nannies and gardeners whose widespread employment occasionally embarrasses the upper-middle-class Zoë Bairds of this world, even as it enables their professional careers by freeing them from domestic chores. The only means of making a job as a

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restaurant busboy even remotely attractive to a native-born American would be to raise the wage to $10 or $12 an hour, at which level the job would cease to exist. This is Economics 101."

Again, what the pro-immigration conservatives won't say is instructive. What is really being celebrated by them is the rebirth of an urban peasant economy, filled by legal and illegal immigrants willing to work for wages that can barely keep body and soul together. They dismiss as utopian the idea that hotels and restaurants ought to pay their workers a living wage, just as they ignore the devastating impact the presence of large numbers of immigrants has had on unskilled native-born workers, particularly high school dropouts. According to the economist George Borjas, a third of their decline in wages during the 1980s was a result of immigration.

Unz stops short of celebrating the return of the sweatshop, and he never goes as far as University of Maryland economist Julian Simon, who calls for an updated version of the old *bracero* or guest worker program that from 1942 to 1964 supplied most of the labor for California agriculture. But the difference between Unz's position and that of the more radical pro-immigration conservatives is purely technical. What neither Unz nor they are interested in asking is, What happens after those working at substandard wages become sufficiently Americanized to want more? Do we send them back to the countries from which they came? Or do we keep them here and simply replace them with newer, more desperate immigrants?

For the pro-immigration conservatives, such questions don't in the long run matter. They see themselves as immune from the day-to-day chaos mass immigration can cause. But for the rest of the country, especially anyone who can't find an entry-level job, such questions *do* matter, and more often than not the response they elicit is a brutal and self-serving one. How could it be otherwise? At a time when wages are falling and welfare is being cut to the bone, the traditional justifications for immigration—America is a land of opportunity, a place of asylum—ring hollow. There is no credible way to talk about compassion for those living beyond our borders when we have so little regard for the needs of our own poor. □

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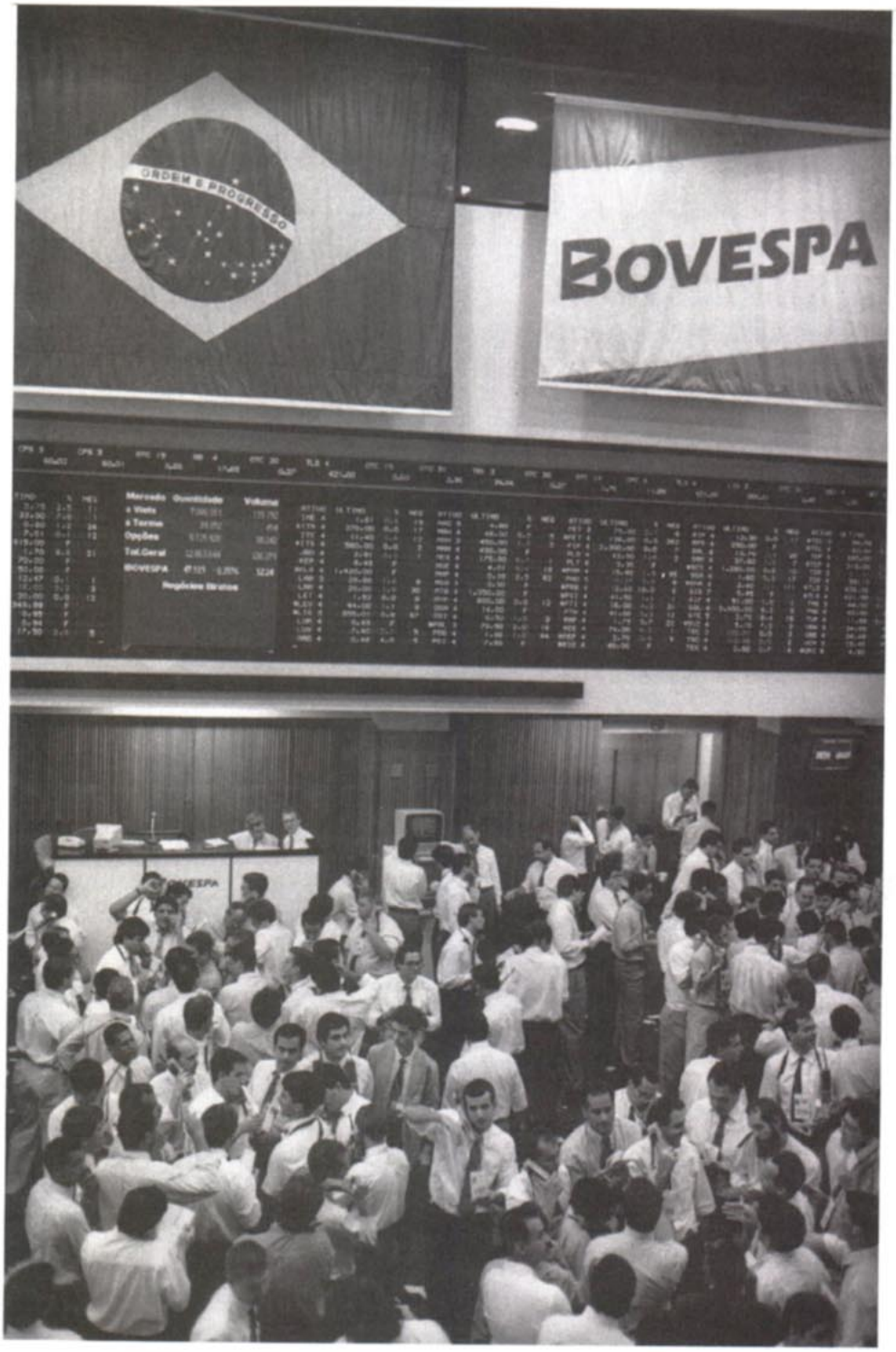

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Anthony W. Pereira

LATIN AMERICA IN THE ERA OF "HOT MONEY"

The Mexican devaluation and subsequent crisis of December-January, 1994-1995 put all Latin American governments on alert. The "tequila effect," as the Mexican debacle was known, was the result of problems facing the whole region, despite avowals by government ministers in Brasília and Buenos Aires that "we are not Mexico." Even in Mexico, whose leaders claim that the economy has stabilized, the real crisis is not over. It is deeper than mere exchange rate disequilibria, and relates to the changing nature of global capitalism.

As global capital has expanded relentlessly into the former communist world and also into countries that had previously offered some degree of protection to national capital, the rules of economic life have changed. In the advanced countries, insecurity for workers has increased: jobs, wages—and in the United States, health insurance and pensions—have all became provisional, subject to removal due to corporate downsizing or the relocation of production abroad. In newly industrializing countries such as Mexico and Brazil, tighter integration within global networks of finance and trade has spelled even greater hardships. Welfare bureaucracies have been stripped and state firms privatized as governments seek to balance their budgets and thereby capture as much foreign capital, much of it short-term and speculative, as they can.

Changes in global capitalism have led to the rewriting of social contracts in many countries and an alarming loss of legitimacy on the part of many governments. In Russia, a recent poll showed that the majority of people would prefer a return to life as it was under Brezhnev to the present situation of shock treatment and "gangster capitalism." In the United States, where economic deterioration has not been associated with a change of regime, public anger with incumbent politicians has escalated as real wages decline and economic insecurity grows. The trend here is toward a "Brazilianization" of society: social apartheid and greater inequality, a decline of the public sector, the rise of heavily fortified and isolated communities of the rich. In recent years the stock market has zoomed while the average real wage has declined.

Internationally, class war is also practiced, although it no longer takes the nationalist form that led critics to decry imperialism in the 1960s and 1970s. Increasingly, exploitation and capital accumulation is a multinational or transnational process, involving global markets and players. Economic crises are also increasingly global, as the Mexican devaluation showed. (For an analysis of that devaluation and the subsequent bailout by the Clinton administration, see Jeff Faux, "Mexico and Vietnam," *Dissent*, Spring 1995.) Mexico's link to the global economy runs, to a greater extent than for most developing countries, through the United States. Yet a similar dependence on foreign markets and capital characterizes countries such as Brazil.

In Brazil, the Real Plan has been in effect for a year and a half. Its basic features are close to Mexico's economic policies before the crash: a de facto fixed (and high) exchange rate is used to hold down inflation. The trade surplus, once one of the largest in the world, has become a deficit that may be as high as $3 billion for 1995. There are few controls on imports, so much of the foreign reserves have been spent for consumer goods for the middle and upper classes

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rather than capital goods that would contribute to future production. Despite signs that overall growth will be around 5 percent for 1995, the economy also seems headed for a recession in the last half of the year. The policy seems unsustainable, and the parallel with Mexico is striking. Eventually, there will have to be a devaluation. Will it be as disastrous as Mexico's? The signs are not auspicious. In March 1995, a small devaluation of the Brazilian currency, the real, forced the Central Bank to spend $7 billion in foreign reserves in an attempt to avoid a Mexican-style slide in currency values. In five days, $2 billion in foreign investment left the country.

Whereas Mexico is part of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Brazil is integrated within MERCOSUR, a free-trade zone encompassing Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay. Within both zones, integration has intensified competition and certain forms of conflict. Argentina and Brazil, for example, are competing fiercely for new investment in the automobile sector.

But this desperate competition for investment obscures the fundamental reality that most investment capital in all countries is generated from domestic savings. A study of gross fixed investment in 1970-1992 in relation to Gross Domestic Product in countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) finds an almost perfect correlation between the domestic rate of savings and investment. Japan, at the top of the list, saves on average 34 percent of its GDP and invests 32 percent internally; the United States, on the bottom, saves 18 percent and invests 19 percent; and in the United Kingdom it is 17 percent and 19 percent. The other countries have similar correlations. The conclusion to be drawn from this data is that capital is made at home. Foreign capital can be crucial in making up the difference between domestic savings and investment, and signaling the achievement of a good "investment climate," but in absolute terms it is marginal.

Therefore, Latin American governments' scramble for foreign investment is unlikely to get at the root causes of development problems. The low rate of savings—due in part to extremely inegalitarian income distribution—is one of those causes, and it is only exacerbated by dependence on "hot money," speculative, short-term investment. Unfortunately, it seems as if most governments are pursuing such investment at the expense of almost all other goals. Macroeconomic policy is geared to foreign capital markets; exchange and interest rates, trade balances, and budget deficits are adjusted mainly to suit the whims of investors. The "real economy" of employment, wages, and aggregate demand becomes secondary. Finance capital dominates manufacturing capital. Since increasing economic integration means that trade plays a bigger role in economies than ever before, a Keynesian pact between sectors of domestic labor and capital is less feasible.

Argentina is a useful example. Its economic reforms have been hailed as a success in international financial and business circles. Massive privatizations have dramatically shrunk the state sector. Last year, the economy grew by 7.4 percent. Yet unemployment has doubled in one year to 18.6 percent—the highest rate in the country's history. A large part of the population has been excluded from the benefits of neoliberal economic growth.

Brazil's adoption of neoliberal policies came later and was more gradual than that of Argentina. But if the results of these policies have torn at the social fabric in Argentina—a wealthier country with a more egalitarian distribution of income and higher levels of education and health—they could be catastrophic in Brazil. Recent World Bank data shows Brazil to have the most unequal distribution of income in the world, with the top 10 percent of income-earners enjoying 51.3 percent of all income and the bottom 60 percent with only 15.9 percent.

In the first 12 months of the Real Plan, July 1994 to the end of June 1995, accumulated inflation in Brazil was 35.3 percent. In the first six months of 1995, accumulated inflation was about 10 percent. This compares to 50 percent per month inflation in June 1994. The Real Plan has thus been implemented with considerable technical skill. There is no question that Brazilians greeted the lowering of inflation with enormous relief. A tremendous amount of time and anxiety was expended trying to avoid the worst ef-

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fects of inflation. The success of the plan is the main explanation for the election to the presidency of the former Minister of Finance, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, in October of 1994. However, the decline of inflation exposes to greater scrutiny the tremendous social inequality that torments Brazilian society. In the words of current Minister of Finance Pedro Malan, "low inflation and growth, of a permanent character, will permit Brazil to have the effective conditions to treat in a mature, responsible, and non-demagogic manner that which really matters and which will define what we will or will not be in the future as a nation. . . the eradication of our enormous social wounds."

The key phrase here is "mature, responsible, and non-demagogic": what do these terms mean? Is there a danger that the Brazilian government will be so "responsible" that it is unable to address social problems? The answers to these questions vary. Some observers see the Cardoso government as social-democratic in principle but governing under severe constraints, lacking both a domestic majority and favorable international climate, struggling against forms of social inequality with a long history and deep roots. They point to the plausibility of the government's claim that its privatizations and plans to thin the ranks of public-sector employees are in the general interest—since many state-owned enterprises and government bureaucracies have served small, well-organized constituencies rather than the public at large.

Others see the government as essentially neoliberal, enacting reforms necessary to preserve financial equilibrium and attract foreign investment but unwilling to tackle questions of redistribution in a major way. They fault President Cardoso for making an electoral alliance with the Liberal Front party (PFL), an offshoot of the ruling party during the years of military dictatorship (1964-1985) that is dominated by landlords from the clientelistic and impoverished northeast. With such an ally, they argue, a genuinely social-democratic bargain of higher taxes for the wealthy, greater spending on education, health and housing for the poor, and a leaner, more efficient state will never be enacted.

The room for maneuver of the Brazilian government, indebted at home and abroad, does seem to be terribly limited. President Cardoso once replied to a complaint that high interest rates were stifling productive investment by saying that "a government that has to pay money borrowed from abroad can't lower interest rates from one day to the next." The president has created a Solidarity Program, modeled on the social assistance program created during the Salinas de Gortari administration (1988-1994) in Mexico, but in the absence of structural reforms, it is unclear what such a program might be able to achieve.

Another example of the government's approach is the way it handled the problem of indexation. For the past thirty years, Brazil has had a system of automatic adjustments to wages, rents, and interest that builds inflation into calculations. As a way to stop this vicious circle and return the economy to low inflation, the government recently abolished the automatic use of the wage index that had been used in collective bargaining, suggesting that wages should only be increased on the basis of demonstrated gains in productivity. The government is also trying to limit wage bargaining to the company level, avoiding sectoral agreements and weakening union influence. It also wants to keep wage agreements as much as possible out of what it calls "pro-union" labor courts. This has led organized labor to accuse the government of trying to end inflation by ratcheting down wages.

On the other hand, the government has maintained an inflation index for capital. The *Taxa Referencial* is a financial market index that guarantees that the face value of a bond or term deposit will be adjusted to neutralize inflation. This ensures that holders of the government's $70 billion internal debt will remain satisfied. In the past, Brazilian indexation provided daily inflation adjustments for capital and monthly or trimesteral adjustments to labor. Now, the government would like to abolish automatic cost-of-living adjustments for labor entirely—with inflation still running at around 20 percent a year. This will be a fault line of future conflict between the government and its opposition within the unions.

Another fault line concerns the government's privatization program. The pace of privatization has accelerated in recent years. While $3.5 bil-

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lion worth of state enterprises were privatized under President Collor de Melo (1990-1992), $5.1 billion worth were privatized under President Franco (1992-1994). President Cardoso could privatize more than his predecessors. Included on his list is the Companhia Vale do Rio Doce, one of the five largest mining companies in the world, and a firm that made a profit of $645 million in 1994. The government's plan for a large reduction in the public sector has alarmed the unions, worried about job losses and wage "flexibility" under privatized companies. Public-sector unions form a disproportionate share of the membership of the CUT (*Central Unica dos Trabalhadores*), the largest and most militant trade union, politically close to the Workers party.

In May-June 1995, 48,000 workers at Petrobrás, the state oil monopoly, went on strike to pressure the government into dispensing back pay awards and to protest the government's plan to end the oil monopoly and allow private firms into the sector. The oil monopoly was established in the 1950s after an intensive nationalist campaign against transnational oil companies. President Cardoso's father, an Army general, was a leader of the campaign.

President Cardoso labeled the strikers "corporatist," and on May 24 sent in troops to keep order at refineries and guarantee the safety of strikebreakers. Shortages of cooking gas and petrol were blamed on the strikers. The Workers party and its sometime ally, the Democratic Workers party, supported the strike, although some top leaders of these parties tried to distance themselves from the strikers. (Similar alliances of unions and opposition parties are behind disputes over state monopolies and privatization in Ecuador and Bolivia.) In the end, the strike was unsuccessful. Workers returned to work, and on June 20 the constitutional amendment ending the oil monopoly was passed by the lower house of Congress. President Cardoso tried to defuse the situation by promising that Petrobrás would remain publicly owned.

It is important not to overestimate the ideological element in these policy changes. As elsewhere in Latin America, the Brazilian government is trying to increase revenues and cut current expenditures. The privatization of state firms and the efforts to trim federal and especially state budgets are part of these objectives. The neoliberal wave further reinforces and legitimizes these moves.

What is at issue is not the need for economic and administrative reform but the manner in which such reforms are implemented. Few among the opposition in Latin America dispute the need for some reform of an inefficient state sector. In Brazil, only the Communist party (PC do B) is against any scaling down of the public-sector. But public-sector employees, accused of "corporatism" and the defense of undeserved privilege, are reacting to the ways in which these privatizations and cutbacks are usually carried out, without retraining or redeployment of personnel, or any other program that might mitigate the effects of mass firings in a society without the social safety nets of the advanced capitalist countries.

The opposition to the present Brazilian government has not articulated a clear programmatic alternative. That does not mean, however, that no alternative is possible. Some observers have talked about an "open market social democracy," involving a commitment to equity-led growth, peak-level negotiations between unions and employers, industrial policy, and redistribution through tax and interest rate policy. But given its political support base and the array of interests it faces in Congress, it seems unlikely that the Cardoso administration would fully endorse such a policy package.

The recent experiences of Latin American governments make it clear that the Mexican crisis is symptomatic of deeper problems in the region. These problems are part of a global crisis of the democratic nation-state and the liberal ideology of economic development in a world where people are simultaneously pulled closer together and farther apart by transnational forces. The crisis of social disintegration, rising inequality, and governmental illegitimacy in Latin America is unlikely to diminish without global and regional initiatives to prevent the increasing concentration of wealth and restrain the tendency for social "dumping"—for governments to compete for investment by offering the lowest stan-

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dards in wages, job security, taxes, the environment, and restrictions on capital. Some of these initiatives have been discussed in this journal (see Ian Robinson, "Globalization and Democracy," *Dissent*, Summer 1995). Even the International Monetary Fund and World Bank recognize the need to pull back from the brink of a radical free-market approach to global economics. The IMF recently issued a report with a surprisingly sympathetic analysis of the use of capital controls by developing countries to shield themselves from volatility in financial markets. And the World Bank's latest *World Development Report* extols the role of trade unions in enhancing economic productivity, as well as increasing equality and reducing discrimination in the workplace.

Many imaginative and practical proposals exist outside the realm of conventional neoliberal economic prescriptions. Failure to discuss these seriously, and implement the best of them, could bring problems that make the Mexican devaluation of 1994 look trifling in comparison. □

Forrest D. Colburn

THE MALLING OF LATIN AMERICA

The Zimbabwean novelist Chenjerai Hove has said, "In hard times the artist will blend images of despair with those of hope. In good times the writer will depict the madness of over-eating at the expense of cultivating other values." In Latin America today these are "good times"—economies are on the rebound, prosperity is welcome, and it is hard to question the free trade strategy that has led to growth. However, the spending frenzy of those with wealth and income invokes Chenjerai's image of "the madness of over-eating."

A Harvard-trained professor of marketing who works throughout the region asserts, "The desire in Latin America today is for satisfaction and as soon as possible." And satisfaction, apparently, is shopping. Indeed, "shopping" is one of the most commonly used English words throughout the hemisphere (as in, *Ay, lo que me gusta es ir de* shopping *a Miami*). Nothing captures the prevailing mood in Latin America so well as the explosion of malls throughout the region. If the 1980s in Latin America was the "lost decade," because of a continent-wide recession that led to an average per capita fall in income of 25 percent, the 1990s in Latin America is the "mall decade."

On any Saturday afternoon, Bogotá's grand Plaza de Bolívar is all but deserted. The crowd is at the Unicentro Mall, with its 360 stores. Surrounding it is the competition, more malls: Metrópolis, Granahorrar, Andino, Hacienda Santa Barbara, Centro 93, Plaza de las Américas, and so on. Signs announce the construction of even more malls and their coming attractions: excellent street access, elevators with panoramic views, fast food patios, ample parking, 117 stores. At these malls Colombians can shop in stores with names like Jeans & Jackets. For lunch there are the likes of the fast-food restaurant Kokoriko, which offers "Kokori-nuggets" (pieces of deep fried chicken) served on styrofoam plates. Judging from the late model cars in the parking lots, the display of fine clothes, jewelry, and cellular phones, Colombians in the malls spend and spend.

While shopping, they are likely to discuss Bogotá's traffic. Recent studies show that, on average, it now takes ninety minutes to go from house to office in the morning, and another ninety

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minutes in the afternoon to go from office to house. The origin of the problem is in "success"—with a strong economy and lower tariffs (part of the commercial opening), the number of cars in Bogotá has doubled in the last four years.

But not just cars are easier to buy. The new economic development strategy facilitates the appearance at the Carulla supermarket of such imports from the United States as: Nach-Olé Tortilla Chips, Betty Crocker Super Moist Fudge Marble Cake Mix, and Pedigree Puppy Dog Food. The store detective who keeps an eye on the aisles against shoplifting wears a bulletproof vest, testament not only to the violence in Colombia (where the murder rate is nine times that of the United States) but also a stark reminder that the poor majority in Colombia cannot afford these foreign temptations.

In Costa Rica the story is the same. San José's Plaza de la Cultura is now bordered by McDonald's, Archie's, Burger King, and Taco Bell. If one is not eating out, the fashionable place to shop for groceries is the Japanese supermarket Yaohan. With Costa Rica, too, embracing free trade, shoppers can now buy—in a country that exports mangos—canned mango juice from Taiwan and Israel. If you just want water, there is a choice among French, Italian, and Canadian bottled water. And there is lots of imported pet food; the Costa Rican pet food market is now a six million dollar market. Even "kitty litter" is imported.

Between 1992 and 1995, the number of cars in Costa Rica increased by 40 percent. Japanese cars are the most popular, but there are new Volvos, BMWs, and Mercedes-Benzes. The places to go in these cars are the malls, such as Multi Plaza, with two hundred stores, or the just-opened, hit-of-the-town, Mall San Pedro. The outside construction of the Mall San Pedro is described locally as "fake Flintstone rocks," but inside are Victoria's Secret and 259 other temptations. On a recent Sunday there were an estimated sixty thousand visitors to the mall, described in the press as "a shopper's delight." There are many smaller *centros de comercio* in Costa Rica, too, one of which does not allow entrance if you do not arrive in a car (the smart way to keep out those who have no money).

Malls are going up elsewhere in Latin America, from Tijuana to Buenos Aires. In Quito there are now eight malls, the largest of which has four hundred stores. Aside from clothing, hardly anything for sale in the mall is made in Ecuador. Even in impoverished Nicaragua, where unemployment is estimated at 60 percent, those few with money are in a consumer frenzy, especially for imported goods. Despite a decade of revolutionary rule, success in Managua is today measured by what you drive, with the apex being a large Toyota Land Cruiser. La Colonia supermarket at the Plaza de España offers frozen Brussels sprouts, Bugles Corn Snacks, Kraft Miniature Marshmallows, and—in a country whose principal export is coffee—Maxwell House Coffee.

Malls are clearly a U.S. import. Between 1970 and 1990, twenty-five thousand new shopping centers were opened in the United States, one every seven hours. One of the few studies of the phenomenon is a brief book titled *The Mall: An Attempted Escape from Everyday Life*. The work, written by Jerry Jacobs, a sociologist at Syracuse University, asserts that malls are attractive precisely because "nothing unusual is happening." Perhaps malls are appealing in Latin America because they offer an escape from the hard edges of urban life: congestion, crime, and an intrusive poverty.

But the fashion for malls is also inextricably tied to the commercial opening in Latin America. People would not flock to malls to gawk at—and purchase—locally produced consumer goods. An earlier "development strategy" featured "import substitution," which prescribed high tariffs to protect—and encourage—locally produced goods. The hope was to produce a wide range of goods and services, not just a handful of tropical commodities for export. The intellectual fashion now is for "free trade" and "export promotion": a level playing field is all that is judged necessary to ensure economic development. Entrepreneurs will find and exploit comparative advantages within each nation. At least to date, in most countries this strategy has not resulted in much more than the addition of new tropical commodities to the familiar list of coffee, bananas, and sugar. Now there are also exports of mangos, ferns and flowers, macadamia nuts, asparagus, and the like, plus a few finished

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goods like doors, as well as the output of factories established by multinationals taking advantage of cheap labor.

This strategy of development does not look so terribly different from nineteenth-century laissez-faire. So far, though, the macroeconomic statistics of export earnings and of the growth of the gross national product are encouraging. Maybe the strategy, coupled with more prudent government fiscal and monetary policies, will usher in sustainable economic growth. But the consumer frenzy accompanying the region's economic growth is disturbing. Economists worry that the propensity to import is too high and that it will overwhelm export earnings, leading to familiar pressures on the exchange rate. The recent collapse of the much heralded Mexican economic recovery shows how vulnerable Latin American countries remain to collapsing exchange rates. (Economists also worry that too much of recent economic growth has been driven by unsustainable capital inflows.)

But the consumer frenzy is a worry for more than economists. Now that the region has bit of breathing space, elites are not taking a hard look at deep structural problems and trying to identify solutions. Poverty is ignored, as are so many other problems, including the need to consolidate incipient democracies. The paralyzing ideological wars are over, the deep recession of the last decade has ended, and—to generalize grossly—those fortunate few who decide everything are at the mall shopping.

This final decade of the century in Latin America does not show signs of being an era of intellectual or political fervor. To be sure, there are congressional debates, corruption scandals, and election campaigns. But it is hard to identify journals and books, let alone social movements and political parties, that discuss with passion and creativity the problems of individual countries or of the region at large. Bookstores throughout the region offer noticeably fewer books on politics than in previous decades. Taking their place are shelves of "self-help" books and translations of the best-sellers of U.S. business schools. Likewise, many previous centers of political activity are dormant. A dean at the Catholic University of Ecuador revealed much when he said, in the privacy of his office, that Ecuador's universities today play only a reactionary role, that they have no ideas of their own to put forward, they only attempt to put a brake, faintly, on changes instituted by others.

The left in Latin America committed many sins: reckless use of violence, promotion of economic follies, factionalism, and more. But it kept the issue of poverty on everyone's mind, and it held out a dream of a more egalitarian society, where basic needs were met. Maybe it even served as a check on the most blatant displays of consumerism. It was noisy and persistent. But now the left has all but vanished, having been swallowed by electoral politics, consumerism, and nihilism. The social Christian political parties have in the past committed themselves to many of the same ends (via different means), but they seem now to have strayed from their mission. Today they, too, are "at the mall."

Will a new generation of activists emerge? If so, where will they come from and what will be their vision? The trenchant problems of Latin America, where nearly a quarter of the

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population continues to live in what is defined by the World Bank as "extreme poverty," ensure that the region is not at the end of history but at some uncertain beginning. Malls may become a fixture of Latin America, but they are unlikely to hold everyone's attention forever. Indeed, while the per capita number of hours per month spent in the U.S. in malls in 1980 was 7.5, by 1994 the number of hours had fallen to 1.4. □

Luther Carpenter

FLYING ON ONE WING

The French Welfare State Today

The welfare state has always been under attack—by socialists, as something that falls short of socialism; by free marketeers, as socialistic. For twenty years, knowledgeable observers have been predicting its demise. What is its condition today? Is it moribund, or capable of showing new vitality?

The main threat to the welfare state is unemployment. The founders of the welfare state saw full employment as one of its two main pillars: full employment would provide the revenue for social insurance, which in turn would enable workers to carry on after illness or accident, assuring them that in difficult circumstances their family's needs would be met. Yet France has now gone without full employment for almost as long as it had it. French unemployment reached 4 percent in 1975, 7 percent before François Mitterrand's election in 1981, and 10 percent in 1984. Today France has a higher unemployment rate—12.2 percent—than any other welfare state.

The classic policy for achieving full employment was public creation of demand. France had no unemployment problem between 1948 and 1968; between 1968 and 1975, Paris increased spending to keep employment up. The Socialists, after their 1981 election victory, attempted briefly to reduce unemployment through demand-side policies. Minimum wages, family allowances, and pensions were all raised significantly. We all know what the outcome was in a world in which the United States and other nations were raising interest rates: French Socialists abandoned the policy after two devaluations.

But the Socialists learned their lesson too well. Important economists argue that the policies of prime ministers Rocard, Cresson, and Beregovoy were too rigorous in the early 1990s, contributing to a terrible recession. The issue of "Keynesianism in one country" was a thorny one for Socialists in the 1995 campaign. Jacques Delors (the favored candidate of the party until he withdrew in December 1994) was the high priest of zero inflation, in conflict with the expansionary instincts of most socialists. The eventual candidate, Lionel Jospin, promised to temper rigor with expansion, but his platform was no more expansionary than that of Gaullist winner Jacques Chirac. Yet unadmitted Keynesianism still is a necessary part of the welfare state, contributing to "fuller employment." Expansionary policies in 1981 did work—at a very high price—and the Balladur cabinet got a small reduction in unemployment in 1994 in return for a budget deficit equal to 6 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

Since 1982, socialists and conservatives alike have sought to mitigate unemployment through labor supply policies that were ingenious and extensive. One such policy, which actually dates back to 1945, is to remove people from the labor force by lengthening the time of school, encouraging retirement of older workers, and inducing mothers not to work. France has now reached

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the limit of these efforts. Half of eighteen- to twenty-year olds are in school; pushing more into classrooms would be babysitting, not genuine career training. After the 1981 victories, the Socialist cabinet reduced the age of retirement with full pension to sixty. Publicly defined (and financially assisted) rules for reducing the labor force at many companies create early retirement between fifty-five and sixty. As a result, there has been a revolution in retirement; the vast majority are out of the work force by age sixty-two. The third lever on labor supply, paying women to stay home and raise children, was a feature of family policy after the war, but it was reduced from a universal to a means-tested benefit in 1971. No one seriously proposes reversing this because of the cost and because French women want full-time work.

Another bundle of policies for manipulating the labor supply is the "social treatment of unemployment." This includes part-time subsidized jobs in local government and nonprofit services, apprenticeships, and subsidizing private-sector employment of school leavers and the long-term unemployed by exempting employers from Social Security contributions. In 1994, some 2.1 million people used these programs for at least part of the year.

By and large, the social treatment of unemployment amounts to a holding action. Most of its beneficiaries do not appear to go directly into full-time employment afterward. Companies use training programs and exemptions to get cheap labor and to put young workers on probation. The result is a new stage in the lives of young people—an effective delay of their entry into adulthood. Here, too, there are limits. In spring 1994, there was an explosion of public anger when the conservative Balladur cabinet proposed setting the wage for young workers at 80 percent of the minimum wage. The government hastily backed down.

To encourage hiring, the government reduces labor costs for companies through exemption from Social Security contributions. France also devotes much energy to technical training for workers. But all of these efforts to affect the labor supply do little to induce companies to expand their work force. Nor is there any prospect that the modest economic growth that characterizes this stage of late capitalism can wipe out mass unemployment. In the meantime, over a third of the unemployed have been seeking work for more than a year. The long-term unemployed alone make up more than 4 percent of the labor force. Large numbers of people with jobs increasingly worry about the prospect of being without work. A 1993 poll showed more people angry about unemployment than about homelessness, world hunger, or Bosnia. This helps explain why the National Front, blaming immigrants for unemployment, got more working-class votes than any other party in the 1995 presidential elections.

One radical answer to mass unemployment is the reduction of the work week, combined with job sharing. The idea seems mathematically obvious—divide a constant volume of work by more people. A leading union, the Confederation française democratique de travail (CFDT), and leading ecologists argue for this approach, which has been effectively blocked since 1981. At that time, the Socialist cabinet announced that the work week would be reduced to 35 hours in stages. After the first cut, to 39 hours, the plan was abandoned. The jobs generated, only twenty thousand to seventy thousand, weren't worth the political energy. Workers were also unhappy because "sharing" didn't seem to include positions of authority. No plan that I've seen pressed managers to share jobs with workers; no changes were proposed that affected those who monopolize interesting work and chances for career advancement. Production and service workers would have to do the sharing. Thus, reducing hours would accentuate the existing division within the dual labor market. Moreover, employers would bitterly contest any shorter hours at the same pay. They are now accustomed to the eight-hour day and thirty-nine-hour week and have all the flexibility they need to hire part-timers.

In the absence of radical reform, the other wing of the welfare state—social insurance—must singlehandedly meet people's needs and calm their fears. The first line of defense is unemployment insurance. The good news about French unemployment insurance is that most people get

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it. It's only necessary to have worked four months out of the last eight, so young or marginal workers are often eligible. Many long-term unemployed also qualify because benefits run as long as forty-five months if one is over age fifty and had worked twenty-seven out of the last thirty-six months. The bad news is that benefits were slashed several times in the 1980s and 1990s. Half the recipients now get an amount that is comparable to French public assistance.

By 1988 the risk of social exclusion among the long-term unemployed and other poor people had grown so high that the Rocard cabinet created a new social benefit, the *revenu minimum d'insertion* (RMI). The RMI is a payment to people over twenty-five, and women under twenty-five with children, whose incomes fall below the poverty level. The RMI is calculated for each family, to raise its income to a target that depends on the family's size. The amount of money is set low, at best a physiological minimum, but it is normally combined with family allowances and housing allowances. The RMI is phased out gradually for part-time workers, so they are not caught in a welfare trap. RMI thus enables many of its recipients to escape poverty, and promotes real progress toward a basic welfare state goal, the guarantee of a minimum standard of civilized life for all citizens. Over the years, France had created minimum incomes for other targeted groups—old people, handicapped adults, and isolated mothers. The combined effect of all these social benefits is to raise some thirteen million people above the official poverty line. (About 9 percent of France is estimated to live in poverty, compared to 15 percent in the United States.)

Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and even Britain had some form of a guaranteed minimum income before France created the RMI. The originality of the RMI is not just its safety net function, but its "insertion" role. Most of the French believe that the real enemy is "exclusion," not just poverty. So RMI's aim is to assist people who are trying to be part of society. The recipient is supposed to sign a contract with a social worker listing efforts he or she will make to get a job, get training, become more employable.

Does this mean that being unemployed or poor in France is a different experience than elsewhere? So far, the impact of RMI has been modest. One evaluation of its first three years concluded that 20 percent of the beneficiaries had obtained a secure job, while another 15 percent had found part-time or insecure work. The number of *RMIistes* (beneficiaries of RMI) has grown steadily, from 335,000 in 1989 to nearly a million in the first half of 1995, including new entrants and those who haven't escaped. From one angle, the *RMIistes* compose a ghetto of those for whom the market has no use. It could become that, but *RMIistes* are not yet an underclass. They are isolated, but most are childless, and one study in fact suggests that participation in RMI helped improve relations with their extended families (since they weren't always asking for money). The other main effect is to establish links between the long-term unemployed and a broad range of subsidized activities and training programs and social services. Thus, virtually all *RMIistes* get health coverage and many receive housing subsidies. The RMI only supplements earlier benefits; its cost is less than 1 percent of total social spending. In other words, what is different about being unemployed in France is that a social security system is in place.

The RMI tells us a lot about the health of the welfare state. It is capable of innovating, of responding to new problems. In doing so, however, it moves away from its original socialist purposes. The initial goal was to provide basic social protection for working people, and ultimately all citizens. Ideally, it would have eliminated the very need for public assistance. Instead, it has grown as it sought to reduce and palliate the effects of the market. The French are struggling to avoid the political abuses of the American antipoverty programs—the malignant stereotype of a welfare population, which is used as a scapegoat to distract the public from the real needs of working people. But adopting an antipoverty approach, even a sophisticated one, makes the welfare state more defensive. It doesn't rig the market or extend the sphere of nonmarket life; RMI gives its recipients an income that won't compete with the market or market incentives. And RMI doesn't create jobs or economic growth. Mass unemployment remains and continues to pose a serious threat to the very existence of the welfare state.

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The French Social Security system continues to provide the type of services most Europeans expect. Because the main benefits haven't changed drastically since 1982, it's easy to overlook how remarkable they are. Despite cost-containing programs in recent years, there is still a very effective system of universal national health insurance. French life expectancy is slightly higher than Americans'—at two-thirds the cost, relative to GDP, for health care. National pensions are also universal. They guarantee modest comfort for most people over age sixty and are raised to keep pace with inflation. Family allowances are less extensive than they once were, but they still afford a sizeable boost to families with modest incomes. As of 1995, the basic family allowance for three children was about $300 a month—plus supplements for older children in special education, for back-to-school expenses, and for single parents. These benefits are important for sustaining the middle classes and they have a far greater effect on poverty than the RMI.

France devotes about 30 percent of the total national output to social insurance alone (plus more on education). France differs from other welfare states by how it raises the money. The financing system dates to the welfare state compromise of the 1940s, which left the wealthy with relatively low income taxes and Social Security funded by payroll taxes. Whenever deficits arose, these contributions were raised. This was a regressive (and absurd) way to sustain a national responsibility, but it gave the unions and the employers a stake in the system.

Persistent high unemployment threatens this. It lowers revenues and increases costs for both early retirement and unemployment insurance. The last recession created unprecedented deficits. One could argue that the deficit was useful and that France wouldn't have pulled (albeit haltingly) out of the recession without it. But the European Community insists that the total deficit must be reduced to 3 percent of gross domestic product by the century's end in order to proceed with establishing the European common currency. This is no minor issue—socialist followers of Jacques Delors argue that the common currency will protect the welfare state against currency speculation, which makes exporters cautious about expansion and diverts the gains obtained by growth. And there are limits to raising Social Security contributions. Mitterrand halted the Socialists' expansionary program in 1982 because of the fury directed by employers against *pression fiscal*—the combined total of Social Security contributions and direct taxes.

The employers could foment a real crisis, but have been trying instead to work within the welfare state compromise, though shifting the balance of power further in their direction. There is an influential tendency within the *Patronat*, the principal voice for business, that recognizes the need for social peace and wishes to avoid polarization. Jean Gandois, who was elected president of the *Patronat* in 1994, is a believer in negotiation. His constituents admit that high Social Security contributions are offset by relatively low direct wages, and that their total labor costs don't undermine their competitiveness. And while employers want to lower their social insurance contributions, they don't claim this to be a panacea.

In the presidential elections, Chirac described Social Security as a basic right and stated that there was no need to restrict the percentage of gross domestic product going to health care. Pensioners, he promised, would share in economic growth. His first government, under prime minister Alain Juppé, increased the value added tax to reduce the Social Security deficit and to substitute for a part of the Social Security contributions. This follows steps by earlier governments that aimed to shift funding of social benefits more to the national budget and is partly a consequence of the growth of the nonworking population and changes in the relation between work and benefits. RMI, for example, could only be financed by the nation as a whole, and most people agree that family allowances should be a national responsibility. The Rocard cabinet created a new income tax to cover some social spending and Balladur increased it. Jospin would have expanded it further rather than increasing the regressive value added tax. But there was no head-on attack on social insurance in the 1995 election, and the means exist to keep it funded.

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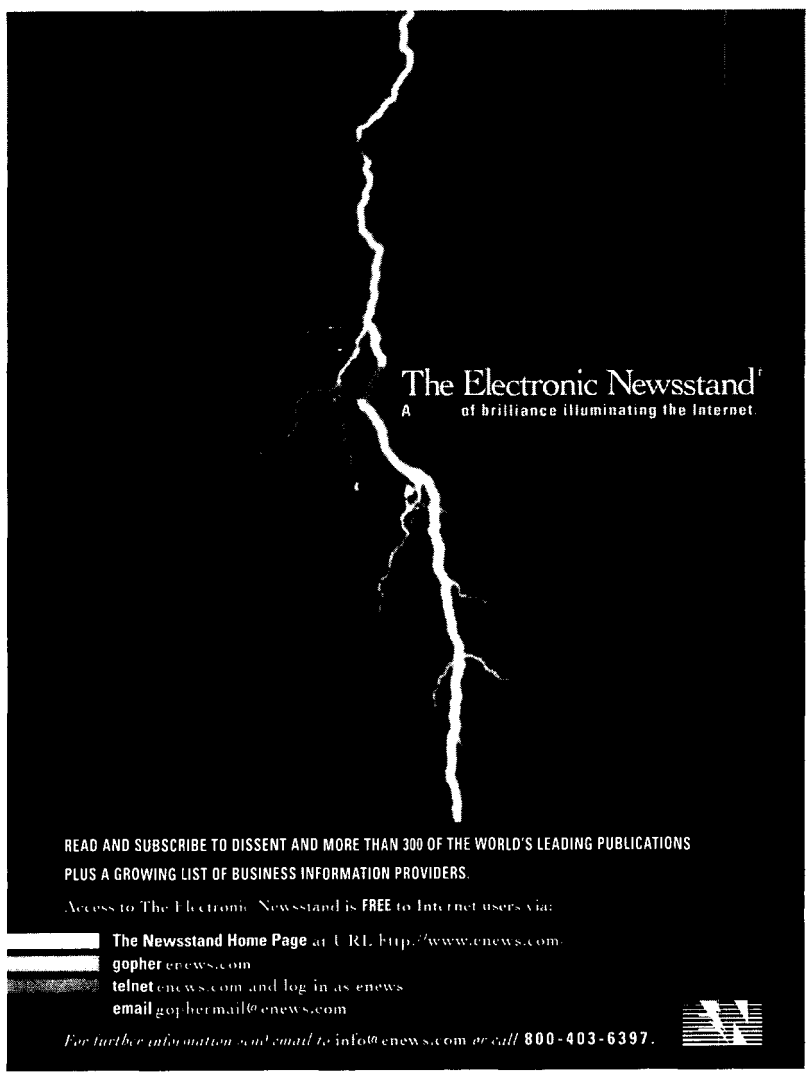
This enduring strength of the social insurance system is an inertial rather than a dynamic strength. It has a cultural legitimacy and is accepted for both pragmatic and ethical reasons by many conservatives who believe it necessary for stability. Still, the welfare state is a second best for these conservatives; the demands of business come first. They recognize, however, that there are limits to free-market fantasies.

Beveridge was right: a welfare state works best when it has full employment. However, the French welfare state still manages to fly on one wing. Social insurance stabilizes demand; it meets basic needs; it redistributes money to sustain middle classes and to reduce poverty; and it dampens social conflict. All these combined with the social treatment of unemployment compensate for mass unemployment. The French example shows that we shouldn't give up too easily on the French welfare state. Those who say it is too expensive or obsolete avoid being specific. Should unemployment insurance be abolished? Pensions? Public health insurance? Even French conservatives know that expanding private health insurance will increase costs. Lower minimum wages risk reducing demand and triggering recession, with no guarantee that more jobs will be created; it is more likely that the same amount of work will be done for poorer pay. A sober consideration of what welfare states have done and still do should alert us to the costs—and dangers—of their demise. □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George Orwell

TELLING PEOPLE WHAT THEY DON'T WANT TO HEAR

The Original Preface to *Animal Farm*

"Nothing has contributed so much to the corruption of the original idea of socialism as the belief that Russia is a socialist country and that every act of its rulers must be excused, if not imitated." So wrote George Orwell to introduce a Ukrainian edition of Animal Farm *four years after his celebrated novella was written. He composed the book in a brief three months beginning in November 1943, and while it is now a classic, it is often forgotten how difficult it was for him to get it into print. Two major British publishers refused it, and Dial Press, in New York, informed him that "it was impossible to sell animal stories in the USA."*

Plans were made for its publication by a small British press, and Orwell, sometime in 1944, penned a sharp, passionate preface defending the "right to tell people what they do not want to hear." In the end, however, a major firm, Secker and Warburg, accepted it. Animal Farm *appeared in mid-1945 and became a best-seller, but without the original 1944 preface, which was rediscovered a quarter of a century later. It appears here for the first time in an American publication, courtesy of the estate of the late Sonia Brownell Orwell.* — EDS.

This book was first thought of, so far as the central idea goes, in 1937, but was not written down until about the end of 1943. By the time when it came to be written it was obvious that there would be great difficulty in getting it published (in spite of the present book shortage which ensures that anything describable as a book will "sell"), and in the event it was refused by four publishers. Only one of these had any ideological motive. Two had been publishing anti-Russian books for years, and the other had no noticeable political color. One publisher actually started by accepting the book, but after making the preliminary arrangements he decided to consult the Ministry of Information, who appear to have warned him, or at any rate strongly advised him, against publishing it. Here is an extract from his letter:

> I mentioned the reaction I had from an important official in the Ministry of Information with regard to *Animal Farm*. I must confess that this expression of opinion has given me seriously to think . . . I can see now that it might be regarded as something which it was highly ill-advised to publish at the present time. If the fable were addressed generally to dictators and dictatorships at large then publication would be all right, but the fable does follow, as I see now, so completely the progress of the Russian Soviets and their two dictators, that it can apply only to Russia, to the exclusion of other dictatorships. Another thing: it would be less offensive if the predominant caste of the fable were not pigs. I think the choice of pigs as the ruling caste will no doubt give offense to many people, and particularly to anyone who is a bit touchy, as undoubtedly the Russians are.

This kind of thing is not a good symptom. Obviously it is not desirable that a government department should have any power of censorship (except security censorship, which no one objects to in wartime) over books which are not officially sponsored. But the chief danger to freedom of thought and speech at this moment is

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not direct interference of the MOI or any official body.

If publishers and editors exert themselves to keep certain topics out of print, it is not because they are frightened of prosecution but because they are frightened of public opinion. In this country intellectual cowardice is the worst enemy a writer or journalist has to face, and that fact does not seem to me to have had the discussion it deserves.

Any fair-minded person with journalistic experience will admit that during this war official censorship has not been particularly irksome. We have not been subjected to the kind of totalitarian "co-ordination" that it might have been reasonable to expect. The press has some justified grievances, but on the whole the government has behaved well and has been surprisingly tolerant of minority opinions. The sinister fact about literary censorship in England is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban.

Anyone who has lived long in a foreign country will know of instances of sensational items of news things which on their own merits would get the big headlines—being kept right out of the British press, not because the government intervened but because of a genial tacit agreement that "it wouldn't do" to mention that particular fact. So far as the daily newspapers go, this is easy to understand. The British press is extremely centralized, and most of it is owned by wealthy men who have every motive to be dishonest on certain important topics. But the same kind of veiled censorship also operates in books and periodicals, as well as in plays, films, and radio. At any given moment there is an orthodoxy, a body of ideas which it is assumed that all right-thinking people will accept without question.

It is not exactly forbidden to say this, that or the other, but it is "not done" to say it, just as in mid-Victorian times it was "not done" to mention trousers in the presence of a lady. Anyone who challenges the prevailing orthodoxy finds himself silenced with surprising effectiveness. A genuinely unfashionable opinion is almost never given a fair hearing, either in the popular press or in the highbrow periodicals.

At this moment what is demanded by the prevailing orthodoxy is an uncritical admiration of Soviet Russia. Everyone knows this, nearly everyone acts on it. Any serious criticism of the Soviet régime, any disclosure of facts which the Soviet government would prefer to keep hidden, is next door to unprintable. And this nationwide conspiracy to flatter our ally takes place, curiously enough, against a background of genuine intellectual tolerance. For though you are not allowed to criticize the Soviet government, at least you are reasonably free to criticize our own. Hardly anyone will print an attack on Stalin, but it is quite safe to attack Churchill, at any rate in books and periodicals. And throughout five years of war, during two or three of which we were fighting for national survival, countless books, pamphlets, and articles advocating a compromise peace have been published without interference. More, they have been published without exciting much disapproval.

So long as the prestige of the USSR is not involved, the principle of free speech has been reasonably well upheld. There are other forbidden topics, and I shall mention some of them presently, but the prevailing attitude toward the USSR is much the most serious symptom. It is, as it were, spontaneous, and is not due to the action of any pressure group.

The servility with which the greater part of the English intelligentsia have swallowed and repeated Russian propaganda from 1941 onward would be quite astounding if it were not that they have behaved similarly on several earlier occasions. On one controversial issue after another the Russian viewpoint has been accepted without examination and then publicized with complete disregard to historical truth or intellectual decency.

To name only one instance, the BBC celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Red Army without mentioning Trotsky. This was about as accurate as commemorating the battle of Trafalgar without mentioning Nelson, but it evoked no protest from the English intelligentsia. In the internal struggles in the various occupied countries, the British press has in almost all cases sided with the faction favored by the

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Russians and libeled the opposing faction, sometimes suppressing material evidence in order to do so. A particularly glaring case was that of Colonel Mihailovich, the Yugoslav Chetnik leader. The Russians, who had their own Yugoslav protégé in Marshal Tito, accused Mihailovich of collaborating with the Germans. This accusation was promptly taken up by the British press: Mihailovich's supporters were given no chance of answering it, and facts contradicting it were simply kept out of print.

In July of 1943, the Germans offered a reward of 100,000 gold crowns for the capture of Tito, and a similar reward for the capture of Mihailovich. The British press "splashed" the reward for Tito, but only one paper mentioned (in small print) the reward for Mihailovich; and the charges of collaborating with the Germans continued.

Very similar things happened during the Spanish civil war. Then, too, the factions on the Republican side which the Russians were determined to crush were recklessly libeled in the English left-wing press, and any statement in their defense, even in letter form, was refused publication. At present, not only is serious criticism of the USSR considered reprehensible, but even the fact of the existence of such criticism is kept secret in some cases. For example, shortly before his death Trotsky had written a biography of Stalin. One may assume that it was not an unbiased book, but obviously it was saleable.

An American publisher had arranged to issue it and the book was in print—I believe the review copies had been sent out—when the USSR entered the war. The book was immediately withdrawn. Not a word about this has ever appeared in the British press, though clearly the existence of such a book, and its suppression, was a news item worth a few paragraphs.

It is important to distinguish between the kind of censorship that the English literary intelligentsia voluntarily impose upon themselves and the censorship that can sometimes be enforced by pressure groups. Notoriously, certain topics cannot be discussed because of "vested interests." The best-known case is the patent medicine racket. Again, the Catholic church has considerable influence in the press and can silence criticism of itself to some extent. A scandal involving a Catholic priest is almost never given publicity, whereas an Anglican priest who gets into trouble (e.g., the Rector of Stiffkey) is headline news. It is very rare for anything of an anti-Catholic tendency to appear on the stage or in a film. Any actor can tell you that a play or film which attacks or makes fun of the Catholic church is liable to be boycotted in the press and will probably be a failure.

But this kind of thing is harmless, or at least it is understandable. Any large organization will look after its own interests as best it can, and overt propaganda is not a thing to object to. One would no more expect the *Daily Worker* to publicize unfavorable facts about the USSR than one would expect the *Catholic Herald* to denounce the pope. But then every thinking person knows the *Daily Worker* and the *Catholic Herald* for what they are. What is disquieting is that where the USSR and its policies are concerned one cannot expect intelligent criticism or even, in many cases, plain honesty from Liberal writers and journalists who are under no direct pressure to falsify their opinions. Stalin is sacrosanct, and certain aspects of his policy must not be seriously discussed. This rule has been almost universally observed since 1941, but it had operated, to a greater extent than is sometimes realized, for ten years earlier than that. Throughout that time, criticism of the Soviet régime *from the left* could only obtain a hearing with difficulty.

There was a huge output of anti-Russian literature, but nearly all of it was from the Conservative angle and manifestly dishonest, out of date, and actuated by sordid motives. On the other side there was an equally huge and almost equally dishonest stream of pro-Russian propaganda, and what amounted to a boycott on anyone who tried to discuss all-important questions in a grown-up manner. You could, indeed, publish anti-Russian books, but to do so was to make sure of being ignored or misrepresented by nearly the whole of the highbrow press. Both publicly and privately you were warned that it was "not done." What you said might possibly be true, but it was "inopportune" and "played into the hands of" this or that reactionary interest.

This attitude was usually defended on the grounds that the international situation, and the

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urgent need for an Anglo-Russian alliance, demanded it; but it was clear that this was a rationalization. The English intelligentsia, or a great part of it, had developed a nationalistic loyalty toward the USSR, and in their hearts they felt that to cast any doubt on the wisdom of Stalin was a kind of blasphemy. Events in Russia and events elsewhere were to be judged by different standards. The endless executions in the purges of 1936-38 were applauded by lifelong opponents of capital punishment, and it was considered equally proper to publicize famines when they happened in India and to conceal them when they happened in the Ukraine. And if this was true before the war, the intellectual atmosphere is certainly no better now.

But now to come back to this book of mine. The reaction toward it of most English intellectuals will be quite simple: "It oughtn't to have been published." Naturally, those reviewers who understand the art of denigration will not attack it on political grounds but on literary ones. They will say that it is a dull, silly book and a disgraceful waste of paper. This may well be true, but it is obviously not the whole of the story. One does not say that a book "ought not to have been published" merely because it is a bad book. After all, acres of rubbish are presented daily and no one bothers.

The English intelligentsia, or most of them, will object to this book because it traduces their Leader and (as they see it) does harm to the cause of progress. If it did the opposite they would have nothing to say against it, even if its literary faults were ten times as glaring as they are. The success of, for instance, the Left Book Club over a period of four or five years shows how willing they are to tolerate both scurrility and slipshod writing, provided it tells them what they want to hear.

The issue involved here is quite a simple one: is every opinion, however unpopular—however foolish, even—entitled to a hearing? Put it in that form and nearly any English intellectual will feel that he ought to say "Yes." But give it a concrete shape, and ask, "How about an attack on Stalin? Is *that* entitled to a hearing?", and the answer more often than not will be "No." In that case the current orthodoxy happens to be challenged, and so the principle of free speech lapses.

Now, when one demands liberty of speech and of the press, one is not demanding absolute liberty. There always must be, or at any rate there always will be, some degree of censorship, so long as organized societies endure. But freedom, as Rosa Luxemburg said, is "freedom for the other fellow." The same principle is contained in the famous words of Voltaire: "I detest what you say; I will defend to the death your right to say it." If the intellectual liberty which without a doubt has been one of the distinguishing marks of Western civilization means anything at all, it means that everyone shall have the right to say and to print what he believes to be the truth, provided only that it does not harm the rest of the community in some quite unmistakable way. Both capitalist democracy and the Western versions of socialism have till recently taken that principle for granted. Our government, as I have already pointed out, still makes some show of respecting it. The ordinary people in the street—partly, perhaps, because they are not sufficiently interested in ideas to be intolerant about them—still vaguely hold that "I suppose everyone's got a right to their own opinion." It is only, or at any rate it is chiefly, the literary and scientific intelligentsia, the very people who ought to be the guardians of liberty, who are beginning to despise it, in theory as well as in practice.

One of the peculiar phenomena of our time is the renegade Liberal. Over and above the familiar Marxist claim that "bourgeois liberty" is an illusion, there is now a widespread tendency to argue that one can only defend democracy by totalitarian methods. If one loves democracy, the argument runs, one must crush its enemies by no matter what means. And who are its enemies? It always appears that they are not only those who attack it openly and consciously, but those who "objectively" endanger it by spreading mistaken doctrines.

In other words, defending democracy involves destroying all independence of thought. This argument was used, for instance, to justify the Russian purges. The most ardent Russophile hardly believed that all of the victims were guilty of all of the things they were accused of, but by holding heretical opinions they "objectively"

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harmed the régime, and therefore it was quite right not only to massacre them but to discredit them by false accusations. The same argument was used to justify the quite conscious lying that went on in the left-wing press about the Trotskyists and other Republican minorities in the Spanish civil war. And it was used again as a reason for yelping against *habeas corpus* when Mosley was released in 1943.

These people don't see that if you encourage totalitarian methods, the time may come when they will be used against you instead of for you. Make a habit of imprisoning Fascists without trial, and perhaps the process won't stop at Fascists.

Soon after the suppressed *Daily Worker* had been reinstated, I was lecturing to a workingmen's college in South London. The audience were working-class and lower-middle class intellectuals—the same sort of audience that one used to meet at Left Book Club branches. The lecture had touched on the freedom of the press, and at the end, to my astonishment, several questioners stood up and asked me: did I not think that the lifting of the ban on the *Daily Worker* was a great mistake? When asked why, they said that it was a paper of doubtful loyalty and ought not to be tolerated in wartime. I found myself defending the *Daily Worker,* which has gone out of its way to libel me more than once.

But where had these people learned this essentially totalitarian outlook? Pretty certainly they had learned it from the Communists themselves! Tolerance and decency are deeply rooted in England, but they are not indestructible, and they have to be kept alive partly by conscious effort. The result of preaching totalitarian doctrines is to weaken the instinct by means of which free peoples know what is or is not dangerous.

The case of Mosley illustrates this. In 1940 it was perfectly right to intern Mosley, whether or not he had committed any technical crime. We were fighting for our lives and could not allow a possible quisling to go free. To keep him shut up, without trial, in 1943 was an outrage. The general failure to see this was a bad symptom, though it is true that the agitation against Mosley's release was partly factitious and partly a rationalization of other discontents. But how much of the present slide toward Fascist ways of thought is traceable to the "anti-Fascism" of the past ten years and the unscrupulousness it has entailed?

It is important to realize that the current Russomania is only a symptom of the general weakening of the Western liberal tradition. Had the MOI chipped in and definitely vetoed the publication of this book, the bulk of the English intelligentsia would have seen nothing disquieting in this. Uncritical loyalty to the USSR happens to be the current orthodoxy, and where the supposed interests of the USSR are involved they are willing to tolerate not only censorship but the deliberate falsification of history.

To name one instance. At the death of John Reed, the author of *Ten Days that Shook the World*—a first-hand account of the early days of the Russian Revolution—the copyright of the book passed into the hands of the British Communist Party, to whom I believe Reed had bequeathed it. Some years later the British Communists, having destroyed the original edition of the books as completely as they could, issued a garbled version from which they had eliminated mentions of Trotsky and also omitted the introduction written by Lenin.

If a radical intelligentsia had still existed in Britain, this act of forgery would have been exposed and denounced in every literary paper in the country. As it was there was little or no protest. To many English intellectuals it seemed quite a natural thing to do. And this tolerance of plain dishonesty means much more than that admiration for Russia happens to be fashionable at the moment. Quite possibly that particular fashion will not last. For all I know, by the time this book is published my view of the Soviet régime may be the generally accepted one. But what use would that be in itself? To exchange one orthodoxy for another is not necessarily an advance. The enemy is the gramophone mind, whether or not one agrees with the record that is being played at the moment.

I am well acquainted with all the arguments against freedom of thought and speech—the arguments which claim that it cannot exist, and the arguments which claim that it ought not to. I answer simply that they don't convince me and

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that our civilization over a period of four hundred years has been founded on the opposite notice. For quite a decade past I have believed that the existing Russian régime is a mainly evil thing, and I claim the right to say so, in spite of the fact that we are allies with the USSR in a war which I want to see won. If I had to choose a text to justify myself I should choose the line from Milton: "By the known rules of ancient liberty."

The word *ancient* emphasizes the fact that intellectual freedom is a deep-rooted tradition without which our characteristic Western culture could only doubtfully exist. From that tradition many of our intellectuals are visibly turning away. They have accepted the principle that a book should be published or suppressed, praised or damned, not on its merits but according to political expediency. And others who do not actually hold this view assent to it from sheer cowardice.

An example of this is the failure of the numerous and vocal English pacifists to raise their voices against the prevalent worship of Russian militarism. According to those pacifists, all violence is evil, and they have urged us at every stage of the war to give in or at least to make a compromise peace. But how many of them have ever suggested that war is also evil when it is waged by the Red Army? Apparently the Russians have a right to defend themselves, whereas for us to do so is a deadly sin.

One can only explain this contradiction in one way: that is, by a cowardly desire to keep in with the bulk of the intelligentsia, whose patriotism is directed toward the USSR rather than toward Britain. I know that the English intelligentsia have plenty of reason for their timidity and dishonesty, indeed I know by heart the arguments by which they justify themselves. But at least let us have no more nonsense about defending liberty against Fascism.

If liberty means anything at all it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear. The common people still vaguely subscribe to that doctrine and act on it. In our country—it is not the same in all countries: it was not so in republican France, and it is not so in the USA today—it is the liberals who fear liberty and the intellectuals who want to do dirt on the intellect: it is to draw attention to that fact that I have written this preface. □

dissent

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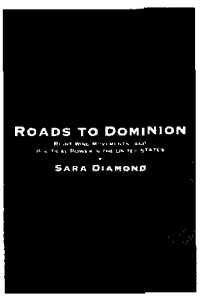

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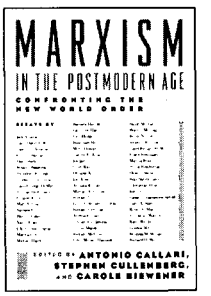
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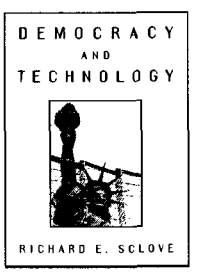

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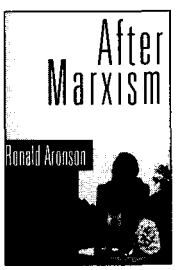

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Catharine R. Stimpson

WOMEN'S STUDIES AND ITS DISCONTENTS

I think, therefore I am dangerous—A feminist button

In the spring of 1995, I taught an undergraduate class in women's studies at Rutgers University, a large public university. All of the students, even the "nontraditional" ones, were younger than I. I felt a fine affection for my students: the political science major who wanted to become a record producer; the white woman who galvanized the class with her descriptions of being on welfare as a single mom; the African-American student, the first in her family to attend college, whose mother and aunt had protected her while she was growing up in a tough urban neighborhood; the out lesbian who drove a Jeep and insisted on spelling women "womyn."

The class taught me about the current stage of women's studies, a field that is constantly evolving. This provoked me to think about women's studies at large: its achievements; the discontents it has caused and suffered; its place in the larger story about women and education, particularly in the United States. I see this story as consisting of three waves, although the formulaic and Toffleresque qualities of the metaphor abash me. So does its static quality. For the waves wash over each other. Shannon Faulkner, for example, is chronologically a Third Waver using Second Wave legal theory to achieve a First Wave goal.

The First Wave was for access to educational institutions and the domain of reason. Its riders have had to wage an obnoxious battle to convince powerful and powerless alike that the female skull did embrace an agile brain and that this brain was worth cultivating. The First Wave, gathering strength in the West in the nineteenth century, was inseparable from women's push for access to political institutions. In many places, the First is still the leading wave.

The Second Wave gathered its strength in the middle of the twentieth century. I am a Second Waver. Crucially, the Information Society, at once ballyhoo and the fabric of our lives, was simultaneously emerging. In part, the ambitious riders of the Second Wave renewed the struggle for access; in part, they sought to transform institutions of teaching and learning.

A Third Wave, which includes my students, is now picking up speed in turbulent waters. Who will ride this wave most successfully? When and where will it break? The answers to such questions are unknown.

Because historians have mapped the First Wave so well, let me begin with the second.

In the Information Society

For many reasons, the struggle over women's education was less visible during the early middle and middle part of the twentieth century than it was in the nineteenth, certainly in the United States. In the 1960s, it gained renewed vigor—even as the Information Society was being born.

In the Information Society, education—the active acquisition of theories, knowledge, and information-handling competencies—matters for success. The Information Society tells us that our minds, not our bodies, are our power generators. Obviously, not everyone who cares about educating women for citizenship in the Information Society is a feminist. The necessity of educating women, at least narrowly, is a theme on which feminists and many nonfeminists now agree. Only hardy misogynists and gender traditionalists today believe that women are best

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barefoot, pregnant, and illiterate.

Feminists, however, have cared passionately about women's education. Self-consciously and imaginatively, contemporary feminism invented itself as a sweeping movement for educational change. First, though not always foremost, feminism would improve child-rearing and socialization practices. It would rebuild the schoolroom of the home. Next, it would organize small "consciousness-raising" groups, where women would learn from each other about their lives in order to change those lives. Next, feminism would attack the media, the studios that market lessons and images for a mass culture. Next, feminism would create cultural alternatives, a new art, literature, film, music, journalism, and religion. Finally, feminism would "transform," or at least alter, the sites of formal education from childcare to research centers.

Not surprisingly, important texts of the Information Society and of feminism appeared at the same time. For example, in 1962, Fritz Machlup issued his pioneering text about the Information Society, *The Production and Distribution of Knowledge in The United States*, analyzing the production of knowledge as an economic activity. In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*. In 1972, the Japanese presented a white paper, *The Plan for Information Society, a National Goal Toward Year 2000*, and *Ms.* magazine went into action. In 1977, the American Library Association took up the question of libraries in a postindustrial, information society, while Elaine Showalter was publishing *A Literature of Their Own* and Barbara K. Smith "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism." In 1982, John Naisbitt, in *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives*, told Americans that the most explosive shift in their lives was that from an industrial to an information society, and Carol Gilligan, in *In A Different Voice*, suggested that women and men differed as moral reasoners.

Feminism's transformative educational acts had two goals. Though they overlapped, they mirrored one of the dominant tensions within feminism at large. Was the chief end of feminism the support of gender equality, which stressed the similarities between men and women, or was it the redemption of gender difference, which stressed female specificity? The first and more reformist educational goal was equal access for women to existing institutions, an access that the first wave had been unable to achieve: schooling for all women; legitimacy for women and women's studies in "mainstream" academic disciplines; entry to powerful all-male undergraduate schools, such as the military academies; entrance and far greater rates of admission to professional education; a warmer welcome in such citadels of power as presidencies, boards of governors, and tenured faculties; huskier access to sports. The second and more radical goal was the creation of a variety of ideas, norms, and public spaces about and for "women as women": theories about women's ways of knowing, women's centers, rape crisis centers, the more separatist women's studies programs, and lesbian studies.

Both goals provoked resistance, the reformist goal less than the radical, for many pursuers of the radical goal celebrated "women-identified women" and questioned heterosexual norms. And yet, the explicit alliance between contemporary feminists—reformers and radicals—and higher education produced such important victories that many people have concluded that feminism has now given way to postfeminism. To them, Second Wavers are a graying boring troop, given to war stories, choruses of "I am woman, hear me roar," and demands for grateful Mother's Day cards from Third Wavers. Here are some of the great Second Wave achievements, successful because they met deep needs:

- Much overt discrimination, which official policies and practices had formalized, has disappeared.
- Educators are aware of such other gender issues as sexual harassment and the need for childcare.
- Majority women are far more conscious of differences among women, especially racial differences.
- More women are entering colleges and universities. In the United States, between 1980 and 1990, the number of indigenous women attending college increased by 30 percent; Asian American women by 99 percent; African-Ameri-

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can women by 16 percent; Hispanic women by 73 percent; white women by 15 percent.

• Employment is more equitable. In the United States, between 1972 and 1989, the proportion of women who were assistant professors grew from 24 percent to more than 38 percent. By 1993, 44.7 percent of assistant professors were women.

• Women and gender, as academic subjects, have entered the culture and the curriculum. Under a variety of rubrics, "women's studies" is a force. About two thousand colleges and universities now have some sort of a women's studies curriculum. In 1970, at the American Philosophical Association's convention, none of the hundred papers was on race or gender. In 1990, twenty-one of two hundred and twenty-four papers took up these issues. Authoritative dictionaries, thesauri, encyclopedias, companions, and guides are now being published. People can go on-line to get core reading lists.

The four international meetings about women that the United Nations sponsored between 1975 and 1995 strengthened the global perception of the importance of women's studies primarily because of the work of nongovernmental organizations. By 1990, at least one hundred and sixty-four free-standing and university-based research centers focused on women. By mid-1995, the National Council for Research on Women, with over seventy-five member centers in the United States, had 254 international research and resource centers on its formal listing.

Not every program has flourished; many programs still scrounge for institutional resources. Not every pioneer has survived. Nevertheless, in part because of the sacrifices of the pioneers, a moral, cognitive, and affective vision of education is in place. Utopian dreams of the radical social transformations that women's studies might breed still linger, but the pragmatism of increasing maturity tempers them. Symbolically, the title of the 1995 National Women's Studies Association meeting, an event that has survived several near-death experiences, was both bold and qualified: "Cultural, Intellectual, and Political (R)evolutions."

New Themes, New Questions

Women's studies began with a critique of knowledge and its institutions. If these two had been adequate, women's studies would have been irrelevant. They were, however, inadequate, for they had excluded, marginalized, and belittled women. One effect was to mismeasure sexual difference by making the male "the norm" of human behavior and the female an abnormal variant.

Under the influence of anthropologists, historians, and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, women's studies then distinguished between sex, a biological condition subject to some of the rules of nature, and gender, a social construction subject to the rules of culture. One may be born female, de Beauvoir claims, but one becomes a woman. All societies have biological females, but the meaning of becoming a woman differs from one society to another. All have biological males, but the meaning of becoming a man differs from one society to another. All have gender systems, but their structure, processes, and meanings differ markedly. Under the pressure of these perceptions, women's studies taught itself not to speak of a universal woman, an "essential femaleness." To do so was to commit the intellectual sin of "essentialism." Simultaneously, postmodern science and medicine were inventing brave new reproductive technologies that also destabilized beliefs about gender relations that once seemed fixed by nature's law.

Much of the energy of women's studies was and is spent documenting the invidious nature of sexual differences; their often-violent hierarchies; their often-disabling discriminations. Sexual politics hurts women. In the 1970s, however, some feminists began to distrust the analysis of sexual difference that stripped women of agency and cast them as little more than men's victims. They wanted to picture women instead as survivors and creators. In philosophy, for example, Sara Ruddick began to elaborate the theory of "maternal thinking," a benign cognitive and ethical activity that arises from the practice of mothering.

In the 1970s, in part in reaction to the interest in "the female" or "women's culture," men's studies were first developed: an elaboration of "the male" or "men's culture" or "the construction of masculinity." Women's studies regarded

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men's studies with a contradictory combination of suspicion, tension, respect, and warmth. Indeed, Queer Studies, which has grown defiantly in the 1990s, actively seeks to demonstrate how "queerness" is a common ground for some women and men. However, men's studies proved far less compelling than several other issues that cut to the quick of the women's studies of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The first is the very subject of women's studies. Is it women, a sex-specific group, or gender, a system that constructs and links the meanings of "woman" and "man"? Inexorably, gender studies has supplemented and in some places supplanted women's studies. Because "gender" is arguably a more capacious term than "women," this may be a valuable move, but it has provoked a sharp attack in Europe and North America on intellectual and political grounds.

The second issue is the status of postmodern and poststructural theories. Philosophically, they sustain the attack on "essentialism" and, in a compatible move, question the assumption that the languages we use accurately mirror the realities we inhabit. Instead, "discourse" shapes and sculpts these realities. Psychologically, postmodern theories provide a picture of the self that is fluid and fragmented, a turbulent river fed by multiple streams and springs. I am woman; hear my self-divisions roar.

Traversing both of these issues is a third, that of differences among women. Even the most benighted essentialist must admit that women have differed and do differ. Even the most benighted advocate of the belief in Woman as Total Victim must accept a painful contradiction: if many societies deprive women of power over themselves, some women still have powers to exercise. In the United States, for example, white women did own black slaves—of both sexes.

Rapidly, the study of differences among women joined the study of differences between women and men. Several activities are involved here. One, which the journal *differences* represents, is the sophisticated inquiry into the various meanings of "difference." Another, more prevalent, is the exploration of group difference. From the beginning, ideology, methodology, theoretical commitments, and disciplinary allegiances had divided people in women's studies. In the 1970s, women's studies fissured even further into academic cohorts that fused the study of sex and gender with at least one other powerful element of biological, social, and/or cultural identity: class for Marxist-feminist or materialist feminist studies; sexual preference for lesbian studies; colonization for post-colonial or subaltern studies; nationality for Australian or Canadian women's studies; religion for feminist spirituality; and race and ethnicity for black feminist studies, Latina or Chicana studies, Native American or Asian-American women's studies.

Each of these groups then engaged in three ongoing tasks. The first is to examine its own structures and internal processes. The second task is to make visible its relations with other groups, particularly relations of domination and dependence. The third, in part an attempt to dissolve such pernicious relations, is for groups to enter into mutually respectful conversations and coalitions. The purpose of some conversations is to write new philosophical, historical, or social narratives. "Dialogue and principled coalition," states the black feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, "create possibilities for new versions of truth." The purpose of even more conversations is pedagogical. The women's studies classroom has been a historic experiment in designing conditions that will encourage interactions among different groups and people. Theorists of feminist pedagogy believe that such classrooms are a model for education in a multicultural world.

Doubts and Worries

To my regret, I cannot end this brief description of the Second Wave on a wholly sanguine note. For Second Wave women's studies has made mistakes that have left it open to doubt. To its unheralded credit, analyzing them is a feature of the serious feminist literature. A persistent error has been to misconstrue the relations between feminism and academic work. I am unquenchably in debt to feminism for a moral vision, blueprints for social change, ideas, psychological support, and vitality. However, academic work demands the interrogation of moral visions, blueprints for change, and ideas. A syllabus cannot

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be an agenda. To be a feminist academic is to balance multiple worlds. Women's studies falters when it gives up the necessary tension between the academy and any social and political movement, and baldly subordinates "studies" to "women."

This abandonment is manifest in the simplistic labeling of complex phenomena. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, women's studies spoke sweepingly about "The Patriarchy" and about "woman"—as if "The Patriarchy" were the equivalent of original sin and "woman" the equivalent of redemption. In the 1970s, women's studies turned from "The Patriarchy" as a description of the workings and fixings of history to an iron triangle, "race/class/gender," a threefold set of historical categories that was meant to characterize all societies, at all times, in all places. Of course, race, class, and gender are crucial categories and experiences that at once unify some people and cruelly divide them from others. But so are tribe, nation, religion, language, culture, age, beauty, or illness.

In turn, reductive thought provided a scaffolding, which both postmodernism and common sense dismantle, for identity politics: the belief that a single, pure element of identity—be it race, ethnicity, nation, gender, sexual preference, or religion—determines one's norms, values, affiliations, politics, public behavior, and subjectivity. Identity politics encourages like to bond with like, and women's studies has been a growth industry for affinity groups. For historical and psychological reasons, these groups stake out a place on the margins of society; very few claim a place in the center. If they do, like some "white women's groups," they express (often legitimately) guilt about their privilege. Consequently, affinity groups begin their work from a position of inconsequentiality. In part because of strong social resistance, in lesser part because a marginal zone can become a quasi-masochistic comfort zone, they tend to travel no further.

Feeling vulnerable, faculty, staff, and students then make too many demands on women's studies programs. They are to provide an impossible model of egalitarianism and cooperation, a haven of principle, a nurturing sanctuary. If a program or a "leader" lapses for a moment, complaints flow as if the two were the unforgivably never-good-enough mother. And nothing, nothing is ever the fault of the complainant. I am woman; hear me suffer, hear me protest, hear my innocence.

Methodologically, many women's studies programs, even those disdainful of reductionism, have relied too much on statements of personal experience and anecdotes. The admirable desire to help each woman develop her voice has had an unintended consequence: neglecting to teach our students how to move effectively in the rhetorical spaces between autobiography and wild overgeneralization, between saying "I hate my father" and "All men are hateful." In this overreliance on the personal voice, we have sometimes permitted individual stunts and childish exhibitionism to substitute for teaching. One woman's masturbatory practices do not a syllabus make.

Finally, women's studies has often been cool towards an increasingly organized but still diffuse collection of critical scholar/writers—interested in the subjects of women and gender but alienated from women's studies as usual. For some of them, women's studies has ignored and evaded the power of nature in the construction of gender—whether nature is revealed through evolutionary biology, the neurosciences, cognitive studies, or genetics. For others, women's studies has refused to admit how necessary to society the legal, heterosexual family is. For nearly all of them, women's studies has turned feminist political convictions into foundational intellectual principles. In a comparatively supportive review of *SIGNS: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* in 1995, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese writes, "One would not turn to *SIGNS* for an impartial appraisal of Margaret Thatcher's record, much less for appreciation of her political genius...What *SIGNS* does, it does well—according to its own lights. And its lights are those of academic feminism, which persists in a determination to see the larger world through its own lens."

Women's studies must now argue out such questions with these critical scholars far more openly. Their writing is the (partially) repressed content of women's studies. As repressed content is wont to do, it returned—in the Third Wave 1990s—in debased and strident form.

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Wave Three

Women have made many educational gains. Since 1986, in the United States, for example, they now earn the majority of bachelor's and master's degrees. Much, though, is left to do. Despite affirmative action, equitable hiring is an ideal, not a commonplace, and, as I have argued elsewhere, if affirmative action survives, it needs rethinking. And its supporters must reach moderates with persuasive arguments as to why it is still necessary in the mid-1990s. In 1992, in the United States, only about 12 percent of the chief executive officers of our 3,500 or so institutions of higher education were women. Tenure is still more elusive for women than for men. Many women are torn between their desire to be a good mother and their desire to be a good scholar, scientist, or administrator; between carrying a laptop and holding a child on one's lap. The phrase "the biological clock vs. the tenure clock" encapsulates this tension. Despite the growth in the number of men who actively care for their children, daily child-rearing is still women's work.

Exacerbating women's difficulties, as well as those of less affluent men, are the current economic troubles for civic institutions in general and higher education in particular. "Spending freezes," "hiring freezes," "privatization," "cutbacks," and that dear euphemism, "restructuring," are the vocabulary of increasing scarcity. Ironically, in the United States, the harder it has become to pay for higher education, the more its market value has increased for both genders. In 1993, college graduates earned 57 percent more than people without a college degree; only the possessors of graduate degrees outstripped inflation over a twenty-year period. A degree's market value has increased in great part because we know that few of us can market ourselves in the Information Society without a degree.

To add to the pain, a belligerent backlash against women is whipping through higher education. Susan Faludi has written pungently of "The backlash brain trust: from neocons to neofems." Indeed, the greater the gain, the more virulent the backlash—perhaps our nasty social equivalent of Newton's third law of motion. The reaction against women's studies is but one element of larger efforts to contain the modern struggle for educational and social equity.

Only the naive will be shocked, shocked that women's studies has stimulated a backlash. Although the opposition reflects professional resistance to any change in bibliographies and lecture notes, it also embodies two gender-specific fears. The first is that women of all races, like minorities of both genders, are irrational, castrators of reason, by nature nonacademic. The second, equally sweeping fear is that changes in our thinking about women will entail dismaying changes in our social, familial, and psychological order. I think of a recent William Hamilton cartoon in the *New Yorker*. Three sleek, well-fed white men are lighting up cigars and lifting brandy snifters before a glowing fireplace. "God," one of them is saying, "they were fun then—women."

Like an angry shadow, the opposition has mutated as women's studies has mutated and as larger forces have stormed over the sociopolitical landscape. Despite these mutations, the opposition has had a constant theme: women's studies is the monster mother of gender rebellion and mindlessness. Since the 1980s, some social conservatives and neoconservatives have organized highly visible campaigns that have lambasted women's studies and announced that academic feminism betrays the free market, the free world, free and objective inquiry, the family, and heterosexuality without tears. Religious fundamentalists chime in that women's studies/academic feminism is ungodly, too.

Recently, in a movement that cohered in 1993, a small group of women who call themselves feminists of one stripe or another has joined in the search for radical or ill-conceived women's studies. Because most of these women chronologically belong to the Second Wave, they articulate an intra-generational perspective that differs from that of younger revisionary writers such as Katie Roiphe. The older women's arguments reconstitute the dreary binary opposition between Good Women and Bad Girls. They are the Good Women of Responsible Feminism and Academic Tradition; the "Others" the Bad Girls of Irresponsible Feminism and Academic Defile-

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ment, witchy creatures who prefer peaked hats and broomsticks to caps and gowns. Most of the Bad Girls seem to be white, another erasure of the contributions to women's studies of women of color. The Good Women of Responsible Feminism often adapt a Gothic narrative strategy. Once inside women's studies, they have now escaped to tell a story of bondage and danger. A 1994 "exposé" bears the scary title *Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales from the Strange World of Women's Studies.*

But the texts that lash out against women's studies belong to a much bigger polemical genre that others and I have discussed: the labeling and dismissing of the "contemporary left," a potpourri that includes people who could not check off the differences between Stalin and Trotsky, let alone Marx and Mao, on a multiple-choice exam. Practiced by both liberals and conservatives, the genre first announces that a culture war is going on. The army of the left barbarians is out to destroy Western values. The army of the civilized must defend the West. But the barbarians (multiculturalists, tenured radicals, radical feminists, gender feminists, gays and lesbians) have apparently won. The forces of civilization must now fight as the English did under the leadership of Winston Churchill in the terrible early days of World War II. Erupting with exaggerations, making a part of the whole the whole shebang, the genre distorts and lies without the slightest sign of shame. Such rhetorical flourishes have helped the genre make its mark.

Cross-Currents

The Third Wave now moves in these cross-currents. The Third Wavers in my classes regard me tolerantly. If I say something passé, I shrug and add, "Just an old Second Waver burbling on." The Third Wave takes the achievements of the First and Second Wave as much for granted as they do CD-ROMs. They also find some fun in critiquing Second Wave dowdiness. They like to wear lipstick—be it pink, red, purple, brown, black, or blue.

Third Wavers believe in education. They apply to graduate and professional schools. Enrolling in undergraduate women's studies, they also want scholarship about women and gender integrated throughout the curriculum as a whole. In 1992, I shared a panel with an African-American student. "I'm so tired," she said, "of going to my Black Politics course and hearing nothing about women. I'm so tired of going to my Women and Politics course and hearing nothing about race. And I'm so tired of going to my American Politics course and hearing nothing about women *or* race." However, until established faculties revise their curricula and their attitudes, many students need women's studies as a breathing space. In 1993, one of my students was an accounting major and the secretary of the university's club for business students. "I'm going into a male-dominated profession," she told a class. "I'm in a male-dominated school. I take women's studies so I can talk without scaring people."

Inside the classroom and out, Third Wavers are aware of diversity and, for the most part, believe in it. Students of color and/or from newer immigrant families want to claim their heritage. My white students long to have permission to make mistakes about "The Other" without being punished or told to shut up in order to learn from these mistakes. They need genuine conversations about diversity with ground rules that they help to devise. They are skeptical of remedial courses in morality that Second Wavers legislate.

The Third Wavers realize that most of them will be earning their living after they graduate. One reason for college is to get credentials for a good job. They expect to enter a diverse work force. If heterosexual or bisexual, they do not expect a man to pay for their food and shelter. Although some Third Wavers are more aware than others of the glass ceiling, although some are more aware of the conflicts between work and family life, although some are more aware that they may run on the fast track all the way to the middle, they all know about job discrimination. Ironically, partly because of Second Wave pressures to advance women in the labor force, several of my students have had women bosses, not all of whom have been paragons of sisterhood. As a result, Third Wavers combine their recognition of job discrimination with skepticism

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about the moral superiority of women.

No matter who their supervisors might have been, Third Wavers are—almost to a person—deeply worried about the economy. Intensifying this anxiety is the financial pressure of getting through college. My students work as waitresses, waiters, baby-sitters, clerks, fork-lift operators, nursing home attendants, security guards. They take out loans. They sign up for too many courses at once so that they can get their degree as quickly as possible. They would like to be less frightened; they would like to think that their education and the economy will mesh. They are too realistic to live by hope alone.

These Third Wavers have complicated attitudes about the sex-saturated culture in which they find themselves, the constant downloading of desire that is designed partially to deflect economic anxieties. The survivors of incest and rape are wary. All of my students are sexually sophisticated. They know a lot about pornography. Indeed, 95 percent of my spring 1995 students said they had first learned about pornography by finding stuff that belonged to their fathers, uncles, or brothers. Fewer of them, however, support the antipornography movement than its advocates might want. For my students have a sexually libertarian and fluid streak. They think that Second Wavers, even as they broke open the discourse of female sexuality, drew too firm a line between heterosexuality and homosexuality. When Third Wavers talk candidly, they say they are sick of being saturated with images of lousy sexualityin pornography, movies and television, advertisements. They are torn. They do not want censorship, but they do not want the images of sexuality that surround them. They long for a balance of sexual satisfaction and cultural grace. Straight, gay and lesbian, or bisexual, most of them want to be parents. They are aware of the new technologies of birth. How they want to parent, and with whom, varies according to the individual.

In Cyberspace

As I sat in the circle of chairs in my spring 1995 classroom with its dreary cinderblock walls, fear tinctured my feelings about my students and work. Would Second Wave feminists, I asked myself, dismiss the words of the Third Wave as an immature siren's cry? Or would we listen to them? I have little faith in my auditory acuities, but I think I hear my Third Wavers ask for two things.

First, they want to hear their own stories, both personal narratives and histories of the groups in which they claim membership. But no matter how necessary these stories are, they are not sufficient. The Third Wavers also want large, cohering narratives. Unless women's studies can write them in accessible language, Third Wavers will turn elsewhere. Where elsewhere might be I do not know. My students want to learn how the postmodern, global economy works and how to find a place in it from which they can support themselves and their families—however they define family. Third Wavers may know about marginality, but they find little glamour in it. The desire for a helpful economic narrative crosses class, gender, and racial lines—a defining feature of a big, sprawling, multicultural center.

Second, Third Wavers want roses as well as bread and keyboards. They need a sense of values. Simply to be against the patriarchy is too barren a landscape of meaning. To be "for" women is more fertile, but this plot is also barren if that is all that there is. My hope is that Second and Third Wavers together can also reaffirm the narrative of modernity itself. I realize how many narratives there are, how scorching postmodern critiques have been, and how dangerous totalizing narratives and universalizing selves can be. Nevertheless, the narrative of modernity encourages us to believe in pluralism over monism, secularism over fundamentalism, democracy over totalitarianism, inclusiveness and equality over hierarchy, acceptance of individual differences over conformity to group norms, and reasonable inquiries over dogma and militant revelations. How can we cast this narrative aside?

However, even if my Third Wavers were to accept a narrative of modernity, they are suspicious of a stress on individual rights that seems to ignore social relations. They like the feminist political theory that *connects* the autonomous self with others; that reassures them that they are free, feminists, and active members of human communities.

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My fears stain spaces beyond my women's studies classroom in New Jersey. Like others, I worry that the contemporary world will back away from the modern effort to picture and treat women as conscious, educable, active, public figures. If so, women will never gain full citizenship in the Information Society, especially if they are poor. This citizenship—like food, water, shelter and freedom from violence—is a survival need. Helping women obtain it is a basic responsibility of women's studies. Even today, women do not have guaranteed access to basic literacy. Table 1.3 of the 1989 UNESCO *Statistical Yearbook* gives the percentage of men and women over the age of 15 who are illiterate in 129 countries and territories. The percentage of illiterate men is alarming, the percentage of illiterate women, especially rural women, more so.

If societies refuse to teach women to read and write a natural language, will they give women access to computer languages and computers? Will women have passports to "telecommunities," (a phrase I owe to George Bugliarello), the groups that form in cyberspace? These telecommunities do more than gossip in chatrooms. They have given women information that can enhance, even save, their lives. As books inspired the Second Wave, so on-line information inspires the Third Wave.

Nor, crucially, do most women have equal access to training in the sciences and technology that are the foundation of the Information Society. One study found that 49 percent of the boys in the eleventh grade in American high schools had used an electricity meter, but only 17 percent of the girls. In 1989, men took 91.8 percent of the doctorates in engineering in American graduate schools; women 8.2 percent. Men took 81.2 percent of the doctorates in the physical sciences; women took 18.8 percent. Aiding and abetting these discrepancies are powerful cultural representations of the scientist. As Evelyn Fox Keller, Carolyn Merchant, and others have shown, we too often masculinize the scientist and feminize the nature that he is to unveil and explore.

These uncertainties about women in the Information Society are part and parcel of questions about the future of cyberspace itself. I write now, not as a computer scientist nor as a skilled weaver of the world-wide web, but as a citizen who does kindergarten-level work with Windows and Word Perfect. Cyberspace is still new territory, if familiar enough to readers of speculative fiction and to hackers. Despite its novelty, cyberspace is busy cultivating old sexist habits. In the United States, on-line sexual harassment and braggadocio have proved so irritating that two antimacho on-line services for women were established in the early 1990s. Coping with this dreary old stuff, women must also join with men to confront the wildly new and unsettled; to determine what the overarching laws and powers that will govern cyberspace are to be.

Though twitchy, I have a stubborn muscle in my optimism. This muscle flexes and insists that history can be its Nautilus machine as well as rack and Catherine wheel. I then remember that men and women have worked throughout history to make education empowering for all; that women's studies has invented itself only in the last thirty years; and that the gender changes that have been inseparable from modernism, feminism, and the birth of the Information Society seem irrevocable. So exercised, I retain my faith that women's studies is helping to redesign democracy and the mind. It is not a monster mother breeding monstrous children, but the work of women and men who have toiled to do that old-fashioned thing: make the world different and better. In our designs, we are a company of equals, some of us smarter and more talented than others, but all of us processing our words with liveliness, liberty, and, from byte to byte, a little happiness. Or so I would will—in this, a Second Wave but unwavering dream. □

Notes

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Todd Gitlin

TELEVISION'S ANTI-POLITICS

Surveying the Wasteland

Democratic politics in the world's oldest democracy is losing popular appeal. Public cynicism about what government, or politics, can accomplish is rampant. American voting turnout has been declining for decades, though with occasional upticks. At the same time, Americans are overwhelmed with imagery and information. What is the relation, if any, between the scandalous obsessions of American news media and the glut of entertainment, on the one hand, and the declining participation and rising demagoguery in American politics?

For more than a decade, American news media have been roundly and loudly criticized for degrading politics. Since 1980, many painstaking empirical studies have established that the principal subject covered during political campaigns is the so-called "horse race"—the question of who is leading, who is behind, who is gaining. To this obsession with polls and competitive strategies has been added a strategic obsession—intense, half-cynical, half-admiring coverage of the maneuvers of the politicians and campaign strategists as they attempt to "position" themselves and manage their images. This tendency is not strictly American, of course. Comparable fascinations and criticisms could be seen in the recent French presidential campaign—a glut of polls coexisting with a skeptical attitude toward them, as expressed in the headline of one critical *feuilleton* piece: "Do you think there are too many, just enough, or not enough polls?"

The press treatment of politics emulates the "postmodern" fascination with backstage tactics in sports and entertainment. The point of much entertainment coverage is to make the audience privy to Hollywood marketing calculations, casting tactics, career moves, and box office figures. We are invited to understand Hollywood not only as a machine for dreams but as a game through which we, the spectators, are dreamed of.

Similarly enthralled by the machinery by which images are manufactured, the press—not only television and radio—treats politics as a game, giving only limited coverage to the positions and records of the candidates. The same is largely true of the coverage of politicians in office. Here, for example, is the lead to a *New York Times* article of July 1994: "Speaking at a heavily scripted community forum here, Hillary Rodham Clinton today previewed the sales pitch she will take on the road this fall to make her case for extensive changes in the nation's health care system." *Previewed the sales pitch.* The media themselves have amplified the observation, first made by academics, that the "discourse" of politics has been crippled by the compression of speeches into ten-second "sound bites," rendering serious debate of public issues impossible. They claim as a warrant for ten-second sound bites the declining attention span of the American public—a declining attention span to which, of course, they contribute.

These are far from the only criticisms to be leveled at news coverage of political life. Critics of various persuasions accused the news media—especially television—first, in the Reagan years, of permitting the White House's smooth-running public relations apparatus to command the national agenda; then, in the case of George Bush, of inflaming racial suspicions through demagogic appeals; and in the case of the hapless Bill Clinton, of failing to manipulate television adroitly enough. Neither of Reagan's successors

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has proved nearly as adept as he in coaxing the media into his embrace, and so the recent emphasis in media criticism has been on the degradation of media coverage into a scurrilous obsession with scandals. The mass media are charged with casting such discredit upon elected officials as to raise public cynicism to the boiling point and to make it difficult for any government to govern.

The American right accuses the news (and entertainment) media of disrespect for "family values" and an excess of sympathy for multiculturalism. The left, such as it is, finds in the media signs of racism, sexism, and homophobia. There is warrant for both views. But the howls of outrage are scarcely limited to partisan and academic circles. Disgust at the spectacle of the mass media is a popular sentiment. At a time when public confidence in American institutions is almost uniformly low, the press is scarcely exempt from popular dissatisfaction. The background is, of course, the widespread feeling that social problems are intractable unless, perhaps, extreme measures are taken. The rise of demagogic pseudo-solutions—severe jail sentences, an end to immigration, not to mention the lunatic terrorism of the ultra-right—is fueled by the pervasive sense that business as usual has not worked. Television is blamed for bringing bad news, but the blame is frequently cast by precisely the same people who rely on television news for their everyday social bearings.

Contrary to the assumptions of contemporary nostalgia, the media obsession with scandalous accusations is nothing new in the history of American democracy. From the early nineteenth century onward, blatant charges of sexual, financial and other forms of personal malfeasance were the conventional stuff of American political life as recorded in the press. The high-mindedness of the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1860 was exceptional. But during the last half-century, the ideal of press objectivity drowned out the memory of the old conventions. A standard of fair-mindedness and sweet reasonableness has jelled, and it is this that seems to many people to have been transgressed in recent years—especially by the tabloid press and related television "reality shows." A considerable portion of the public is plainly angry at what it feels to be the media's trivialization of political life.

In 1992, this anger was so thunderous as to arouse media coverage itself. Never before, at least not in the twentieth century, has the American press been so vociferously attacked, and so defensive about the attacks. In the aftermath of each widely reported scandal, the major media have indulged in massive and public self-scrutiny, in which influential figures in the news media confess to excesses, express doubt about whether they are discharging their debt to democracy, and promise to be more judicious the next time. We saw this cycle at work with respect to the reporting of the Clintons' "Whitewater" and other scandalous investments, along with the charge that President Clinton was guilty of sexual harassment.

The pattern reached something of its high—or low—point during the 1992 presidential campaign, when presumably legitimate media picked up from scandal-mongering weeklies Gennifer Flowers's charge that she had had a long-term affair with then-governor Bill Clinton. The established media quickly became obsessed with these charges on the ground that once they had been made public, even by disreputable media, the charges were "in the public domain" and therefore deserved to be taken seriously. Thus the agenda for the "quality press"—the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times* and *Philadelphia Inquirer,* the three major television networks, public television and radio—was set by the quantity press. And so, in February of 1992, the same issue of the supermarket weekly called *Star*, whose front page offered "FOUND! Ted Danson's forgotten first wife" and "I was Stevie Wonder's secret lover for 24 years," commanded America's respectable outlets with "MY 12-YEAR AFFAIR WITH BILL CLINTON." That the *Star* and later, the syndicated television "magazine" sensation show *A Current Affair* paid for Gennifer Flowers's story (dollars in the estimated six figures) went barely noted. Soon CBS's prestige news "magazine" *60 Minutes* was airing the Clintons' response to the charges, and CNN was carrying Gennifer Flowers's press conference

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live. Thus do the quality media have great difficulty resisting market pressures. Competition leads not to variety but to uniformity.

Again and again, what begins as a sensational accusation quickly becomes mainstream. A strong motive is, not surprisingly, economic. In the last two decades, the three major television networks have lost roughly one-third of their audience to cable-satellite networks and independent stations, which, in turn, have succeeded in recruiting audiences to "real-life crime" programs and scandalous talk shows among other offerings. Moreover, in general, the local stations and major networks have felt pressed to compete with the purveyors of lurid crime stories. One consequence is popular crime panic and the lust for instant solutions—longer sentences, cancellation of parole for repeat offenders ("three strikes and you're out"), and so on.

The abdication of news judgment to the "low-end" press is one more development in the general elevation of celebrity chatter, with the concomitant expectation that politics shall be another branch of the unending entertainment spectacle. In the eyes of most of the news media—I notice that this is true in France and Britain as well—the market certifies what is worth attention. The "upscale" newspapers now regularly report television ratings and movie box-office receipts, and fawn over movie stars; it is no surprise that this fascination with entertainment values has drawn the once more austere news operation in its wake. The president is the Celebrity-in-Chief, fair game for adulation when he plays the part as smoothly as Ronald Reagan, fair game for contempt when he is as young and perplexing as Bill Clinton.

As in the early nineteenth century, when scurrilous charges against politicians were also the order of the day, the eruption of petty scandals has left candidates—and officials—with few good choices. If they stand silent, they are accused of "stonewalling." If the candidate at first tries evasion and later decides to answer the charges, he or she gets accused of "flip-flopping." Having admitted any transgression, he or she seems guilty of bad character.

Political news coverage has become at times an accomplice of demagoguery, at times a branch of the sports and entertainment industries, and at times an exercise in cynicism, keeping Americans diverted, perhaps, but failing to help them govern themselves.

Salvation by New Media?

Is the American media system self-remedying? There are two wings to this hope. First, it is argued that reforms in the traditional media may eliminate, or at least temper, the abuses of recent years. Second, it is argued that new media are emerging, and that they may rectify the situation.

Certainly, popular disgust at the news media's obsession with scandal has pushed the media to an unusual search for self-reform. The established news media have been busily trying to rectify their conduct since 1988. Responding to the charge that the press has given credence to deceptive political advertising, newspapers now routinely evaluate the truthfulness of political candidates' television commercials. Responding to the charge that they have permitted irresponsible candidates to set a distracting agenda by exchanging reckless and misleading charges, several local newspaper, television, and radio enterprises have taken some initiative, asking the public to say what they think the issues should be, attempting to keep political campaigns focused on the most significant questions. The media's attempts at self-rectification may be attributed to good will; they should also be attributed to self-interest, since television networks and newspapers alike are aware that the audience for news is declining steadily. With readership and viewership in seemingly irreversible decline, especially among the young, the major media have a strong interest in appearing to be responsive.

By far the more important reaction to the recent waves of media criticism comes, however, from outside the established media. It comes in the form of new media organizations, new formats, and new technologies, often with new audiences. There is so much novelty, one conventionally hears that America has entered a "new media age." There is incessant talk about the democratic potential of "new news." It is declared that radio and television talk shows have made it possible for citizens to widen the range of opinion publicly expressed; that they permit citizens

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to mobilize on issues of deep concern, and thus make politicians more responsive; that they even permit the organization of an independent presidential campaign like that of Ross Perot in 1992. It is argued that the "deliberative opinion poll" and other links between polls and the media can make politicians more responsive to public sentiment. It is argued that telephone technology permits the financing of new political campaigns. It is argued that computer-telephone hookups—the Internet—nurture political community.

In my view, the democratizing potential of the new media has been drastically exaggerated. Most of the hopes laid on new electronic developments belong in the American tradition of looking to the technological fix for political, spiritual, economic, and social troubles. Technological improvements heighten uniformity more than they challenge it. Let me address these potentials in the course of a review of recent and impending developments in the news media.

Radio talk shows. One of the major uses of AM radio in the United States today is the circulation of angry political talk. Daily talk shows are available at all hours of the day and much of the night. Most of these are local, many have fundamentalist Protestant affiliations, and some have been at work for decades, but one of the new developments is that several now have national hookups, of which the main one in public appeal is Rush Limbaugh's, available for three hours every day (with an additional half-hour television program in much of the country). Limbaugh has become enormously successful serving up a mixture of fierce right-wing views, self-promotional bombast, and nasty humor.

In this ideological enterprise he is not unprecedented: in the 1930s, Father Charles Coughlin, the Catholic "radio priest," offered a potent stream of populist rhetoric, with an undercurrent of anti-Semitism—though as his anti-Semitism grew more ferocious, Coughlin lost a good deal of his following. Limbaugh's right-wing populism focuses anger on government bureaucrats, intellectuals, feminists, and liberals. His devotees pride themselves on being "dittoheads." There are "Rush Rooms" at restaurants and bars around the country, where the faithful gather to listen to their hero in the company of co-believers. What is his influence? It is hard to know exactly. He may well have helped kill health insurance legislation in 1994. But he has certainly impressed the strong Republican opposition that he speaks for them and for the alienated multitude they aspire to represent. .

Most of the talk show talk is unfocused anger, but some has a practical import. Some of the hosts invite their listeners to lobby their representatives or flood the president with mail and faxes. In a few cases, talk show hosts have even coordinated their efforts and had direct political impact—the first successful case was a campaign to keep members of Congress from voting themselves a pay increase. Such symbolic crusades against government privilege are of little material consequence, and display a Republican bias—they are the perfect issues for talk show hosts and their constituencies.

One of the most successful of radio talk hosts, Larry King, is a centrist of no discernible political passion. But one of the striking things about radio talk shows in general is how predictably they tilt toward the right. According to one survey, 70 percent of the hosts, and the callers they attract, occupy positions considerably to the right of American public opinion. This is even true in the San Francisco Bay Area, the most liberal metropolitan area in the country. Former governor and quixotic presidential candidate Jerry Brown, who did a talk show based in Sacramento, was unable to acquire an outlet in the Bay Area. One San Francisco AM station, after trying out several liberal hosts, abandoned them for right-wingers, one of whom, according to Howard Kurtz's forthcoming book, *Hot Air: All Talk, All the Time*, had been fired by another station for denouncing "the stinking Japanese." His new employer proceeded to fire him six weeks later for calling gays "sick" and "pathetic."

The tilt to the right bears some reflection. There are several causes. First, station owners tend to be Republicans. Consider the cancellation by ABC of Jim Hightower's show, syndicated to some 150 stations, although not in the largest markets, after Hightower started ragging on Disney's purchase of the network—"I work for a rodent." ABC said its concern was strictly low ratings; and whether venality or politics was

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the prime cause is known only to the network's bookkeepers. (At this writing, the substitute show is left-of-center.) Second, the audience during commuting hours, when talk radio has its largest audience, is disproportionately male. (Women are concentrated in the audience for *television* talk.) Third, right-wing talk is more theatrical than left-wing talk. It overflows with emotion, particularly spleen and rancor. It has a more compelling dramatic structure. Liberals, who at least superficially value tolerance and reconciliation, do not compete well, for entertainment purposes, with the party of rancor and unreason. Therefore the latter starts with an advantage. Fourth, the counterpart melodrama that Democrats could, in principle, muster would be directed against the rich and the corporations, but they are reluctant to mobilize a populist fury—partly because of their own dependence on corporate funds, partly because their leading figures are comfortable, partly because the union base is so weak.

Without doubt, radio talk shows provide outlets—principally for the angry and prejudiced, whose vulgarity they legitimize. They keep in circulation a rage targeted against immigrants, minorities, welfare programs, feminists, and so on. They are considerable instruments of demagoguery, and a power base for future politicians in the Republican party, especially on its right fringe. President Clinton's denunciation of the radio demagogues after the Oklahoma City bombing was long overdue—and of course was counter-denounced in turn—but did nothing to reduce their significance.

Television talk shows. This genre, popular in the afternoon with women at home, has been a strong presence in American life since the early 1980s. The guests are frequently victims of some sort of abuse—crime in the family, sexual molestation, and so on. Studio audiences are joined by phone callers. The display of curiosity and judgment provides an audience of millions certain assurances of their own normality by giving them a safe, brief, vicarious acquaintanceship with deviance. Phil Donahue's talk show, which pioneered the format, has at times lent itself to explicit political discussion, and indeed, Bill Clinton, under fire from mainstream media, turned to Donahue's program for relief during the 1992 campaign. The in-studio audience format was adopted for one of the candidate debates during that campaign, at Clinton's behest, and he used it to great effect, while George Bush demonstrated only that he was out of touch with popular concerns.

The television talk show is also available as a non-party conduit for political mobilization. The dramatic case in point was Ross Perot's use of the Larry King talk show on CNN to declare his candidacy. Perot proceeded to use another technological novelty to convey the impression that his crusade was a public campaign—he collected funds through an 800 number in a method previously used by Jerry Brown. But such a method is most compelling when the candidate is a billionaire to start with. Had Perot not been a man of enormous wealth, neither his views nor his intentions would have been of interest to Larry King in the first place, nor would his use of the 800 number have carried him to the degree of success he eventually attained, with almost one-fifth of the votes in the general election. Perot's purchase of tremendous blocks of network time for long lectures conveying his views is obviously incapable of emulation by anyone but the super-wealthy.

C-SPAN, CNN, Court TV. For the past ten years, dedicated followers of American politics have been able to feed their appetites by watching two public affairs channels available twenty-four hours a day on cable. C-SPAN, financed by the commercial cable companies, presents the daily deliberations of the two houses of Congress, along with campaign events, academic conferences, book interviews, and so on. The real-time coverage of campaigns has the virtue of eliminating the interpretive middleman, though following this coverage requires a considerable investment of time.

CNN carries considerable coverage of breaking stories, supplemented by occasional talk, daily debates, Washington gossip. But CNN is not nearly so novel as its devotees have claimed. For one thing, its forms of news coverage are largely conventional. (The main exceptions: international reports; extensive coverage of press conferences and congressional hearings; occasional investigative reports; protracted coverage of breaking stories—wars, crimes, natural disasters.) Routine CNN broadcasts have the standard

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forms to which the older networks have accustomed us—the parachuting reporter, the shallow reportorial stand-up, the posture of balance, the truncated debate, the presentation of the world in snippets, the clutter of sound bites. Its political debates compress opinion into the range running from the deeply conservative to the mildly liberal. (The contrast with the BBC World Service, with its extended analytical reports, is stark.) During the Gulf War, thanks to the courage of Peter Arnett, CNN did offer useful though obviously restricted coverage of Baghdad, but otherwise was no more independent of military surveillance and a Washington-centered worldview than the rest of American television. The C-SPAN and CNN audiences are normally small, less than a million a day, though these numbers spike upward in the case of extraordinary events.

For the last several years, Court TV has offered continuing coverage of trials, most famously—or notoriously—the O. J. Simpson saga. What is accentuated by Court TV, and related crime obsessions, is the American tendency to treat reality as a soap opera. It can be argued that it is only *as* soap opera that Americans are willing to consider issues like sexual harassment (the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings) and marital violence (the Simpson case). Insofar as this is so, it is a terrible judgment on the state of democratic discourse.

Agenda-setting through poll feedback. Since 1992, some news organizations have attempted to intervene directly in the agenda-setting process during campaigns. In 1994, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, KQED public radio, and KRON commercial television cooperated in what they called a "Voice of the People" project. Citizens were polled for their sense of the important questions that the candidates should address in the party primaries. The questions were put to the principal gubernatorial candidates. The answers appeared in the newspaper and over the radio. But the answers were brief and frequently evasive. Moreover, many of the issues designated as "important" by the public—for example, crime and immigration—were the products of a positive feedback loop, in which the public embraces those issues defined by the media to be the burning questions of the moment. (The Republicans developed the "Contract With America" in the same manner.) This process recognizes that the candidates frequently have a vested interest in evading important questions, but instead of requiring journalists to take independent positions on the important issues, turns the job over to public opinion polls. This mechanism is therefore not free of demagogy.

Let me add a word about the proposed deliberative opinion poll. This idea has been promoted by the political scientist James Fishkin, and was on the brink of adoption by American public television during the 1992 campaign. (Subsequently it has been used in England.) The idea is that randomly selected persons are brought together for debate over a period of several days. Experts are called in to bid for the allegiance of the group. The entire process is publicly televised, giving the designated citizens a chance to affect each others' views, in the spirit of full-blooded democratic discourse, and giving the rest of the electorate a chance to observe.

Public sphericules: the Internet and other linkages. Not a week passes without popular articles claiming that computer-telephone linkages—fax, computer electronic mail, the Internet, and so on—make possible such a rapid torrent of information that they create vital community, expedite the organization of social protest, popular lobbying, and so on. The claim is that by bringing quasi-public links into the private space of the home and the office, the ensemble of these relations—what the writer Howard Rheingold has called "virtual community"—enables people to move their concerns into public life with an unprecedented vigor and intensity.

It is true that there are now thousands of worldwide linkages among citizen groups organized by political affinity. There are linkups for groups like Amnesty International, PeaceNet, and the Rainforest Action Network. (These are not all on the left by any means: a Rush Limbaugh fan places a summary of the daily Limbaugh conversation on the Internet, and racist groups recruit members there as well.) There are global contacts of a more informal sort, including news from Bosnia and other republics of the former Yugoslavia, electronic exchanges among readers of magazine articles (one can converse with the author) and listeners to radio

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talk (one can converse with other listeners). There are the faxes and electronic mail networks that linked dissident Chinese students with their opposite numbers in the United States during the democracy movement of 1989. There are the huge data-bases that enable journalists and private citizens to conduct rapid research.

Indeed, electronic linkages have lubricated the operations of many grass-roots groups. By bridging the physical gulf between nations, they contribute to the growth of cosmopolitanism—the understanding that one lives in a globally interconnected world. To some degree, the new communication forms expedite the development of what Charles Nathanson has called, perhaps too optimistically, an international civil society. They heighten a global ecological awareness just as, put to different uses, they expedite global flows of capital, finance, resources, and merchandise. The same technologies that have given capital unparalleled mobility also further movements that seek to limit the prerogatives of capital. But there is one problem the new means of communication do not address and may even worsen: the existence of a two-tier society. To those who are information-rich shall more information be given. At present, about one-quarter of American homes have personal computers. About one-fifth of these have modems that enable them to enter the "cyberspace" of computer networks. In other words, five percent of Americans can get onto the computer "superhighway." Without doubt, this five percent includes scholars who wish to collaborate across the oceans; journalists wishing to expedite their research; graduate students who wish to chat, or procrastinate, with like-minded specialists; and activists in search of affinity groups. But at the same time, the gulf deepens between the information-saturated and the information-deprived. Technology, in other words, aggravates a certain class division—the division between the political class and the rest.

This point bears on a theoretical problem. Does democracy require a public or publics? A public sphere or separate public sphericules? The diffusion of interactive technology surely enriches the possibilities for a plurality of publics—for the development of distinct groups organized around affinity and interest. What isn't clear is that the proliferation of publics contributes to the creation of *a* public—an active democratic encounter of citizens who reach across their differences to establish a common agenda of concern and to debate rival approaches. To put the question crudely: are we headed toward a public square or toward a series of segregated secessionist movements?

Fabricated Identities

The significance—even the political impact—of the contemporary media extends far beyond their treatment of formal politics, for American society is saturated by television. The average American watches (or inhabits a room with) television more than four hours a day, most of it entertainment. Watching is second only to work as the primary activity, or inactivity, that Americans undertake during their waking hours. One sign of how thoroughly television has been assimilated, even among the more literate, is that it has become a sign of inverse snobbery to proclaim affection for a pet series. Whole generations of popular-cultural scholars now unashamedly rhapsodize on the stellar qualities of their favored habits. Television is so thoroughly accepted that, however difficult it may be to assess its effects, the effort must still be made.

Without doubt, television has served as an instrument for the nationalization of American culture. In the years of maximum network dominance, when Americans tended to be watching the same programs, television furthered tolerance while eroding ethnocentrism and other forms of parochialism. For good reason did Edward R. Murrow choose to inaugurate the first coast-to-coast broadcast, on November 18, 1951, with a split screen showing the Statue of Liberty and the Golden Gate Bridge simultaneously—for simultaneity is the enemy of cultural heterogeneity. It was no small blow against white supremacy, in the 1950s and 1960s, to bring into the living rooms of white America images of the brutal treatment of blacks—or, for that matter, in the 1980s, to convey to a white audience that professional-class blacks like Bill Cosby were effectively identical to their white counterparts. Distinctions that were formerly sacrosanct—urban/suburban, Northern/Southern, public/private, national/local, naughty/nice—have blurred. To

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use Joshua Meyrowitz's terms, themselves borrowed from Erving Goffman, the "frontstage" world of formal American life is more tolerant—there is a growing degree of gender and racial integration at many professional levels; gay figures pass across the evening news without scandal; African-American stars have their talk-show billings; suburban white teens thrill to African-American rappers. Meyrowitz has argued, in *No Sense of Place,* that television has brought to public view the "backstage" of social life, educating the public to see through appearances, cultivating a knowledgeable skepticism, contributing to the spread of egalitarian sentiments.

Whether one endorses this view or a darker one, it is clear that television has filled a space left vacant by the demise of traditional authority. Television purveys identities, especially for the young, in a fluid, unsettled society where neither work, religion, nor family is stable or compelling enough to do the traditional job. Cultural identity has become modeled accordingly on peers and celebrities. Growing numbers of families are recombinant, so that one (or one's sub-self) belongs to more than one family at a time. In this setting, where people are members of many clubs at once, people increasingly look to popular culture—especially to television—for a vocabulary they can use to identify themselves.

Indeed, to call television a medium of communication seems to miss a good deal of the point. It is somewhat like calling a family a system of communication. Family therapists do so, but their descriptive power is not Tolstoy's. Television is a medium of cultural power. Television may not compel, but it compels attention—this, after all, is its *raison d'être.* But to speak of television as if it were nothing but a sequence of images is to miss a crucial feature, namely how much of it there is and how easily it enters the house.

Television is more than an amusement bank, a national bulletin board, a repertory of images, an engine for ideas, a classification index, a faithful pet and a tranquilizer. It is all of these, but one of its principal impacts is as a school for manners, mores, and styles for repertories of speech and feeling, even for the gestures and experiences of self-presentation that we call personality. Again, this is not simply because television is powerful, but because other institutions are less so; and as work, family, and religion lose their capacity to teach us how we are expected to behave, television takes up much of the slack. Yet ideologically minded critics of the right (the *Wall Street Journal*, for example) or the left (Noam Chomsky, for example), obsessed with the power of ideas over benighted citizens, have perhaps distracted us from recognizing the deepest workings of television because their own rationalist bias impoverishes their social imagination—they cannot imagine that there might be any other reason for wrongheaded policies than the misinformation of influential publics.

Television creates a certain texture of experience. I am struck, in particular, by the growth of "knowingness" to which I referred at the beginning of this paper: a quality of self-conscious savvy that often goes by the name "sophistication." But knowingness is not simply access to knowledge; knowingness is a state of mind in which any particular knowledge is less important than the feeling that one knows and the pleasure taken in the display of this feeling. It is the conviction that it is possible to be "in the know"; it is the demonstration that one hasn't been left behind, that one is hip, with it, cool; it is a mastery of techniques by which to reveal that one has left the sideshow and made it into the big tent.

The content of television is not simply one story after another. As Raymond Williams pointed out, one remarkable thing about television is the sheer profusion of stories it delivers. No previous generation of human beings has been exposed to the multitude of narratives we have come to take for granted in everyday life. The impact of each one may be negligible, but not the impact of the totality.

Because the stories of television exist in sequence, their significance bleeds from one story into another. Television, Williams wrote, has "flow." One thing leads to another. Most people watch swathes of television—they watch *television,* not discrete narrative units. But television not only flows, its flow is both rapid and interrupted. A story begins with credits. A few minutes of story take place. The story is interrupted for commercials—probably more than one per commercial break. There may be previews of

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news bulletins, promotions, previews of other shows. The story resumes. There are more commercials, more announcements. The story resumes. And so on. At the hourly or half-hourly station break, there may be scenes from the following week's episode, scenes from shows later that night, announcements of coming events. Each segment, moreover, comes attended by a distinct bundle of sounds. Since the segments and their sounds are juxtaposed, not simultaneous, what results may be experienced as an extended "horizontal" cacophony. As the remote-control-equipped viewer zaps or grazes through dozens of cable channels—to the delight of postmodernist theorists celebrating the juxtaposition as a freedom—cacophony is in the nature of the pastiche. In the wonderful world of television, anything is compatible with anything else. But even short of remote-control zapping, the paradox is that each particular segment comes immersed in a context that, while multiform, is also reliable. The one continuity is discontinuity.

Now, obviously, rapidity and interruption are not brand-new features of Western civilization. Television is a caricature of what, before television, was already a way of life. The ideals and sins it depicts are those of America's formulaic modernity. The picture may be sepia but the frame glitters. Thanks to slick visuals ("high production values") and crisp movement, glibness rules. Glibness, in fact, is the tribute formula pays to sophistication. The slickness of television, and of popular culture more generally, carries a sense of the tumult and velocity of a commercial version of urban life, the cornucopia of desire, the lure of consumable things and "lifestyles." Commercials don't simply announce the wonders of goods and the lives they promise, they also bring energy and novelty—news of what passes for fun, freedom, and security these days. They invite one to think of oneself as a consumer—or, if one is poor or estranged, an enragé—but not as a citizen.

Moreover, for the most part, the style of speech that cuts across commercial (and most public) television is predictable. Its common currency consists of slogans and mockery. Thanks to the wonders of editing, no one on television is ever at a loss for words. Not even the bereaved parent asked "How do you feel?" about the death of a child is seen to hesitate. Speech is stripped down, designed to *move*. (Thus "Coke is it!" or Nike's equally meaningless invitation to associate its shoes, which *you* can buy, with achievements of the athlete's body: "Just do it.") The one-liner, developed by advertising, is television's stock element. Situation comedies and morning shows are obsessed with this form of speech: the jokey comeback. The put-down is the universal linkage among television's cast of live and recorded characters. A free-floating hostility mirrors, and also inspires, the equivalent conversational style among the young. And it serves as a template for political advertising. None of these styles contribute to the reflectiveness or the passions of political life. Instead, they contribute to a corrosive cynicism.

As Mark Crispin Miller has memorably observed, the knowing attitude is so widespread and automatic, it deserves to be called "the hipness unto death." Relentless if superficial self-disclosure is one of the conventions of television today. The audience is simultaneously alerted to the contrivance, transported behind the scenes, and pleased by both—and by the possibility of enjoying both. In one commercial of the late 1980s, a man in a white coat looks you in the eye and says, "I'm not an doctor, but I play one on TV." The audience is expected to recognize him as a soap opera actor. (He goes on to say that other people also think they can "play doctor" and as a result may take the wrong medicine. He has come to sell the right one.)

The equivalent process operates in our thinking (and feeling) about politics. As I mentioned above, coverage is dominated by inside analysis of the stratagems of campaigns and governance. The audience is flattered that it is superior to the corruption, dishonesty, and hypocrisy of public servants. The viewer has been brought into the know. He or she is treated as an "inside-dopester," savvy to spin-doctors, speech writers, electorate-pleasing "positioning," and all manner of practical calculations. In one sense, what is going on is democratic unmasking: let the politicians remember that they are hired hands! But the cynicism that has become so widespread in

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politics is more likely to generate withdrawal than political engagement.

I am suggesting that the glibness, relentless pace, sloganeering and shrinking attention spans of private life filter into television, via the selective antennae of the television-industrial complexes of Hollywood and New York, only to be reinforced there. The free-floating nastiness of sitcom existence may well be cultivating an equivalent show of popular sentiment, so that the endless put-downs of popular comedy penetrate into the rest of everyday life in the form of bumper stickers and T-shirt slogans, which then recycle into the popular domain. All in all, the sensibilities that television cultivates are inimical to people's engagement in the activities of a political life.

A Cornucopian Culture?

In summary, then: television has nationalized American culture and made it both knowing and thin. Yet this conclusion seems to fly in the face of predictions that television's homogenizing days are waning. Basic cable service now enters 62 percent of American homes, bringing an average of thirty-two channels. The profusion of new cable networks and independent stations has eroded the three-network share of the total audience from its high of 91 percent in 1975 to some 60 percent today. Surely the new age looming before us is an age of wondrous variety—or so promoters of new channels have been assuring us since the early 1980s.

On the surfaces of culture, distinctions do multiply. But the point I argued above with respect to the coverage of political activity also holds for the culture as a whole. Over the course of the decades when a three-network oligopoly dominated television, certain uniformities penetrated deeply into contemporary culture—so much so that they are unlikely to be flooded out by the possibly hundreds more channels soon to pour into the cabled home. Corporate pursuit of new niches ends up exaggerating tendencies already present in the previous system. Postoligopoly "niche" novelties like popular music, home shopping, evangelical Christianity, African-American music, and Spanish language soap operas have in common that they thrive on undiminished enthusiasm for slick entertainment. Advances in interactive technology will probably not divert from the main tendencies; they will be used primarily to render more efficient services that people already use—whether banking, video games, gambling, or quiz shows. Among the many things Americans can feel knowing about will be the sheer array of channels available and the routine surrealism, the normal strangeness, of America's culture of artless juxtapositions—the standard national mall/strip sequence of Taco Bell, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Hut, Fish 'n' Chips, Burger King. Pride in the national cornucopia will become a cornerstone of orthodox American identity in the next century. White bread has already ceased to be the symbol of national unity; it has been supplanted by the new standard supermarket shelf with seventy-two different loaves, each bland in its different way.

The uniformities in present-day American style are not simply the creatures of television or of corporate culture more generally. They build on cultural uniformities observed in 1831-32 by Alexis de Tocqueville, who pointed out, long before Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Roseanne Arnold, or MTV, that America's cultural products "substitute the representation of motion and sensation for that of sentiment and thought. . . . Style will frequently be fantastic, incorrect, overburdened, and loose, almost always vehement and bold."

That television is popular does not make it less demagogic, but rather more so. The odds are that the rule of the slick, the glib, and the cute will prevail. Most of what is circulated through the new cornucopia is old television entertainment recycled—television episodes from earlier years, and old movies. The once-over-lightly glibness of American culture prevails not only on television but in the movies and magazines, among sports announcers and talk show hosts, in politics and psychotherapy alike. It is difficult to resist the conclusions that America's culture of distraction and convenience, of the quick fix and fast relief, of mass-manufactured labels of individuality, has acquired in television a useful technology to reduce the spectrum of life to a pale center glittering with multicolored sequins. □

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Barbara Probst Solomon

FIDEL IN MANHATTAN

Fidel Castro came to New York this past fall and had the wisdom to conclude his visit by popping into the offices of the *New York Times*. He boasted about how he had tricked the *Times* correspondent Herbert Matthews into believing that he, Castro, had commanded lots of troops in the Sierra Maestra in 1957. "I ordered the same troop of weary soldiers to parade past him again and again." Castro is still a genius at managing the press. He came and went from New York strictly on his own terms. President Clinton's and Mayor Guiliani's provincial bad manners in excluding Castro from the UN fiestas actually helped his press campaign—New Yorkers were embarrassed at the *gaffe*— but it does not account for the meek, muffled, and meager reports we got from the New York media moguls who had private meetings with him. What the public was handed were social notes—what mogul munched what hors d'oeuvre with Castro—not journalism. No one seemed able to give a coherent account of their meetings with Castro. Since this was not the Sierra Maestra days, why was the public being kept in the dark?

My own week with Castro, or, more accurately, not with Castro, played out in a strange way. I sent my credentials over to the Cuba Mission to be put on the journalists' list for Castro's visit. I am well known to them; they read my columns in *El País*. (*El País* is Spain's equivalent of the *New York Times*, and its international edition is read throughout the Latin American world.)

My only dealing with the Mission was in the eighties, when two members of its delegation paid a visit to my apartment with an official offer to visit Cuba. It was the usual offer. I would be their guest. Typically, an interview with Castro was dangled, but not promised. We discussed openly my close friendship with the Spanish and Latin American "Boom" writers who originally gave Castro his revolutionary lustre, then broke with him. One of the delegates insisted that Castro was "broadminded" about such associations; he urged me to write a personal letter to President Castro. "If you do that there is an excellent chance he will accord you an interview and then you will go to Cuba." I doubted that an interview would be forthcoming, but I did write a formal request to interview him, and I said that I would bring up the human rights issue. I never got a reply.

That was a decade ago. Now Castro was arriving in New York, and being courted by David Rockefeller, Lee Iacocca, Mort Zuckerman, the Council on Foreign Relations, the luxury magazine *Cigar Aficionado*, businessmen hungry for a shot at the Cuban market, ecologists presenting Cuba with composite toilets to compensate for water scarcity, and an eager press.

Though the European press carried many stories about his impending visit here, the American press behaved as though on a James Bond secret mission. The *New York Times* kept mum as if his visit had to be shrouded in mystery. Why? When the pope or a controversial world figure like Yasir Arafat comes to the United States the press generally does a pre-event news analysis. Castro arrived in New York on October 21, yet the *Times*'s news analysis of our relationship to Cuba wasn't published until well after he left, on October 31.

Two days before Castro arrived in New York I finally contacted one of the American culture organizations that act as a go-between for Cuba,

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the Cuba Mission, and the United States. Castro, they said, would be speaking Sunday night in the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem.

I was told to contact IFCO, the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organizations, which was in charge of invitations and press credentials. After lots of back-and-forth telephone conversations I was told to come to IFCO on 145th Street at three o'clock Saturday to pick up my press accreditation. On Saturday the city was flooded by torrential rains. I showed up like a drowned rat at IFCO's Harlem office at three. I went to the second floor of the small town house converted into a makeshift headquarters. I was not on the list. I was sent upstairs to another office.

One of the three women there was jubilant. "Hey!" she yelled. "We've got the drums!" The young volunteer I had spoken to over the telephone was sympathetic. But the older woman in charge, the one I now needed to talk to, looked grim.

"An error was made. You are not to be on the list."

"But I was told to come here at three. I was told that I was on the list."

The young woman I had spoken to on the phone looked unhappy. "We are favoring a press with a local history—grass-roots publications."

"You mean no one has ever heard of them?" I again insisted that I'd been told to pick up my credentials at IFCO.

"You misheard," the grim woman said. "You were told if you came here at three that *maybe* you would be on the list. The list is closed."

I kept protesting and addressing the young volunteer. The older woman then said they had to speak about the matter alone, and they left the room. I waited alone. Was this a case of random inefficiency? Or was it that I had the wrong set of writer friends? I racked my brain. I never had directly written about Cuba, but I had signed human rights protest letters. I couldn't figure out whether the woman was having a bad day or whether her icy treatment of me was intentional.

When the woman came back she said that press credentials had been given out "on the basis of historic presentation of Cuba."

I didn't understand her rhetoric, and again protested: "I haven't made any historic presentation of Cuba."

She then played her trump card. "We have CNN—we have plenty of coverage. Our reasons for granting press credentials are based on historic presentation of Cuba."

I went back out into the pouring rain, furious that I had let myself in for the now-you-see-it, now-you-don't tease. Once home I sent off an angry fax to the cultural organization that had originally cleared me with IFCO.

The next morning I was recontacted by IFCO. The error had been re-corrected. I was back on the list. I was to present myself at the Abyssinian Baptist Church at three o'clock. The nice woman I had originally spoken to met me across the street from the church. By mid-afternoon the highly polished Harlem bourgeoisie who had attended Sunday services in the churches in the area were being replaced by television cameramen and the police. We went across the street into a temporary basement office, briefly discussed the matter again, and I was given the credentials. I noticed that several foreign journalists whom the Cuban Mission had sent over were being questioned in an adjoining room in the basement headquarters.

IFCO had been upfront with me about wanting only favorable press. Once I had the press pass I began to feel queasy. Somewhere in the chain of events and myriad phone calls and meetings I had said (which I truly felt) that I was against the blockade of Cuba. I had also given assurances that my editors wouldn't be able to change the politics of anything I wrote (also true). It occurred to me I might have conveyed the impression I would not act as a member of a hostile press. But suppose I didn't like what I heard inside the church? As a working journalist what would I do? Would I squelch any negative feelings I had in what I wrote? Would the reader suffer? My coverage was such a small piece of the whole—did it really matter? It felt murky.

A small group of media journalists were watching the CNN group set up their cameras. They were furious with Turner: "CNN was in Havana in April. Turner gives Castro what Castro needs, and Castro gives Turner what he needs."

On Malcolm X Boulevard, across the street from the police barricades, was a display table with pro-Cuban anti-imperialist publications. Also on the table was *La Gaceta de Cuba*, the literary magazine of the official union of Cuban

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writers and artists. The issue featured an article by Severo Sarduy, the exiled Cuban poet who died of AIDS in Paris. Sarduy's name jolted me: it was a ghostly reminder of Castro's vanished relationship to the writer-intellectual.

Gone are the heady days of the time of Fidel's first visit to New York, when the perception of Fidel Castro's revolution as dreamed by Paris intellectuals still seemed plausible. Just when the French *nouveau roman* was dying, the Latin American Boom writers—Sarduy, Juan Rulfo, Gabriel García Marquez, Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Jose Donoso (Octavio Paz always remained to one side of the Boom)—were providing intellectuals in Paris new hope for the novel and an intellectual validation for a revolution with an anti-American spin.

I walked across 138th Street to the place I had parked my car. I sat in it, taking notes and trying to puzzle things through. I saw a passing couple point to me, and I heard them say that I was "the security car."

I walked back across the street, past the bodega and the bakery, and past the small knot of anti- and pro-Cuban demonstrators, and TV cameras focused on them, to the church. Castro, in freshly pressed army fatigues, was arriving under the white protective canopy. We were ordered to stand well back on the sidewalk. It was exactly like those canned demonstrations that Franco used to order up for himself. I could picture the faithful, including the hand-picked press, yelling "*Castro si, Cuba si.*" I'd been in politically canned situations before. There was no way for the working press to cover his speech at the church without becoming an inevitable actor in Castro's New York theater. I chose at the last possible moment not to go in.

The next day Castro was reported to have said that when he rode through New York everyone uptown had thumbs pressed down, while in Harlem everyone had thumbs up for him. Which gives the world the impression that Castro was greeted by the multitudes. No story in the press reported that the reverse was true: the business community gave Fidel a chic welcome; Harlem, other than the small group of pros and antis near the church, seemed oblivious to his presence.

Castro has an acute awareness that our press has disintegrated into mere photo images, and he flirts with it like a nineteenth-century coquette. He knows that he can invent imaginary multitudes in Harlem the same way he invented imaginary troops for Herbert Matthews. When he isn't sure of drawing crowds, such as in the Hispanic sections of the city, he does his impromptu jack-in-the-box act. Castro is famous for his nonstop oratory, but his real talent is for masterful visual effects, from his pressed army fatigues to the live chickens in his rooms during the old days at the Hotel Theresa.

Castro totally dominated Sunday television. His midday UN speech was followed by short CNN blips announcing Bernard Shaw's hour-long prime-time interview with him. His big event at the Abbyssinan Baptist Church was perfectly choreographed to come after the Shaw interview (with just enough time to change from his suit and tie to his fatigues). Not since de Gaulle has any visiting political figure received treatment like this: tremendous media coverage with not a single tough question asked.

Bernard Shaw looked miserable. Castro, all sweetness and light as he jovially slapped Shaw on the knee, was making no bones about the fact that Shaw's boss, Ted Turner, was his best chum. Shaw was being publicly put in the ignominious position of acting as Turner's paid lackey. In the new stylish media morality, Turner and Castro's close palship, because it is overt, is not considered a conflict of interest. But the feel-good gossipy aspect of the Shaw interview was a landmark television disgrace. The froth replaced what should have been straight coverage and interpretation of our relationship to Cuba, plus an update about conditions on the island. Shaw *mentioned* the recent Americas Watch report on human rights in Cuba, then did no follow-up.

As the United States moves toward a *gradualista* policy toward Cuba, we will be dealing with two versions of Castro: the airbrushed version and the non-airbrushed version. The American press had a unique opportunity to ask Castro to respond to substantive issues. Instead, the press colluded with his fabrication of a secretive ersatz casual private event. Instead of news, we were given social notes from the Sierra Maestra. Edward R. Murrow, where are you? □

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David L. Kirp

HOW GAYS LOST IT AT THE MOVIES

Last spring, *Cruising*, a 1980 film about a serial killer who stalks the gay sex clubs of New York City, played before packed houses at San Francisco's Roxie Cinema. Little controversy attended the week-long run at the city's premier revival house. Although quiescence usually goes unnoticed, this non-event, in a community whose gay citizens know how to make themselves heard, deserves attention. It's a marker in the ever-shifting and ever-contested terrain of gay self-identity.

When *Cruising* first came out, it was trashed as a horror flick in which gays were the monsters, a piece of ungenteel slumming by hateful Hollywood. Not only was it junk, gay activists argued, it was *dangerous* junk that threatened to stir up the already roiling pot of homophobia. Filming in the meatpacking district of Manhattan was dogged by street protests. Gay columnists urged a boycott. In many cities, demonstrators heckled moviegoers; to see this film, they insisted, was itself a political act, an antigay act. Those demonstrations recalled the 1969 Stonewall riots, the Boston Tea Party of the American gay revolution, because on both occasions people who in the past had surrendered to the realities of power were acting in unprecedented ways to defend what they saw as a threat to their own identity.

Writer-director William Friedkin, who had made his reputation with *The French Connection* and *The Exorcist* responded to these criticisms by inserting a disclaimer amid the credits: "The film is not intended as an indictment of the homosexual world. It is set in one small segment of that world which is not meant to be representative of the whole." But the assassination of San Francisco gay political leader Harvey Milk was a recent, vivid memory; and there was at the time a spate of unsolved gay murders in Greenwich Village. The organizers of the anti-*Cruising* protests feared the movie might incite a new wave of anti-gay violence, much as those who now point to the menace of Hollywood's gore-*meisters* believe that, sometimes, life horrifically imitates art.

The Roxie Cinema caters to the tastes of its heavily gay audience, and it is hardly immune to the call of political correctness. Not long before *Cruising* was shown, the theater management had scratched another film from its schedule when confronted by lesbians angry at how it portrayed them. For the Roxie to revive *Cruising*, given the film's sordid reputation, was freighted with social meaning—it was as if *Birth of a Nation* were to be shown in the heart of Harlem or *The Eternal Jew* in Skokie. More remarkably, *Cruising* wasn't presented as a vintage piece of cinematic homophobia for audiences to hiss at, William Friedkin held up as a Leni Riefenstahl. Instead, in its newly struck 35 mm print (the restrike itself an homage to artistry), the movie was billed as a serious and misunderstood work by an *auteur*. If this wasn't quite a masterpiece, the Roxie's blurb asserted, it was certainly a movie that told inconvenient truths, a film whose biggest problem was having been "conceived and born of a time too timid to deal with its own harsh realities."

To the surprise and relief of the theater management, there was no picketing, no call for a boycott, when the film was shown. Fifteen years earlier, *not* to go was an act of gay solidarity, similar to the gay boycott of Minute Maid dur-

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ing the late 1970s to protest the antigay politicking of Anita Bryant, the company's spokesperson. Now, however, it seemed prudent to determine for oneself whether the film actually had anything to say. Besides, those of us who had stayed away were curious to see what the fuss was about. To condemn the film, sight unseen, would mimic the infamous example of Arlene Croce's treatment in the *New Yorker* of choreographer Bill T. Jones's dance piece on AIDS.

A reviewer for the *Bay Area Reporter*, a local gay paper, bemoaned the absence of outrage. "It's always easy to return to the scene of the crime," he wrote tartly, "once you know most of the witnesses are dead." But that view was the decided exception. If audience buzz is a fair gauge, most moviegoers could identify with the depiction of life in the gay fast lane a generation, and an epidemic, ago. Rightly so, for *Cruising* turns out to be one of the most candid films ever made about gay America.

Peep Show

The plot line of *Cruising* is simple enough. A naive young New York policeman played by Al Pacino goes undercover, bait to lure a serial killer who hunts his prey in the S&M world of leather bars, peep shows and parks. Slowly, the murderer makes his presence known. During the opening credits, a severed arm surfaces in the Hudson; and later on a decaying torso is discovered. A handful of leathermen are stabbed after having sex, while the unseen murderer repeats the incantation: "You made me do that." As the days the young cop spends in this netherworld stretch into weeks, his sex life with his girlfriend deteriorates. He becomes emotionally close to Ted, his gay neighbor, a would-be playwright who isn't part of the S&M scene. He perceives that he is changing and pleads to be taken off the assignment, but is bullied by his boss into staying on.

Eventually, the cop catches the killer, a graduate student unhinged by his father's rejection, and returns to his old life. Case closed. Or so it seems, but then Ted is murdered in circumstances that suggest that the young policeman—jealous of Ted's lover, unable to contain his own feelings—might be responsible for at least this last act of violence.

Like most treatments of gay life that deserve to be called art, *Cruising* is more complicated than labels like homophobic or homophile suggest. The film constructs a precarious heterosexual identity for the policeman, contrasting the allure of the gay world with the sterility of straight convention. It shows gay life in its vanilla as well as its kinkier versions. It spins a pop-Freudian tale about the power of parental condemnation to turn fragile psyches into psychopaths. And even as members of the S&M community watch out for one another, whether in their sex play or on the streets where the killer stalks, in *Cruising* it's the police, whose repeated acts of sadism against gays—against Pacino as well, when he seems to have "gone native"—are sanctioned by the state.

None of this got much ink from the gay critics, though, for they were mainly furious about how sex gets depicted. *Cruising* is no peck-on-the-cheek film. When men kiss, their tongues scour and chafe one another's mouths. They go down on one another in darkened corners, and shove their fisted, Criscoed arms deep into the bowels of men who hang suspended in slings like so many slabs of beef. Although such scenes had been filmed before, much wilder ones too, they were always in porn flicks targeted for an audience in the know. *Cruising* let everyone in on the secret, and this was its sin. That isn't us, or at least most of us, our sex lives are actually much more beige—or so the argument went. But since mainstream America won't make such fine distinctions, this movie will just give the bigots one more excuse for their bigotry: that's why it should be boycotted.

Sex Clubs or Same-Sex Marriages?

Fifteen years later, the innocent decadence of the time depicted in *Cruising* has become a standard chapter in the annals of gay history. To watch the film now is to be sharply reminded that the scant dozen years between Stonewall and AIDS was driven more by the allure of sexual liberation—the newly won freedom to play as hard, as long and with as many people as one wished—than by the dream of civil rights, more fixated on sex clubs than same sex marriages. Those first

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years of the gay rights movement fit the *zeitgeist*, a "make love, not war" moment that joined sexual polymorphousness with grandiose politics, even within the ostensibly more sober crusades for racial and gender justice.

Some anti-*Cruising* activists believed the film's verisimilitude was itself the problem. They wanted Hollywood to crank up its propaganda machine, to deliver a stream of gay *Bill Cosby Shows* in which gays were shown as just like everyone else, to seduce America into offering gays a place at the proverbial table. Homosexuals were not, of course, first to the post in pushing for such artistic cleansing. It's a staple demand of well-meaning organizations that look after the good name of Italians or Jews, Latinos or fundamentalist Christians, any group with a history of being caricatured by the image-makers and a perceived stake in the identity-politics game. The rationale for such policing is understandable—the abuses of Hollywood have been vivid and gross—but the result is a victory neither for art nor life. Politics above art, propaganda before integrity, makes for a dangerous business.

In fact, although those who would sanitize depictions of gays lost the battle over *Cruising*, they have won the Hollywood war. Even as *Cruising* has been rescued from the junk pile of sexploitation flicks, it has been marginalized as a period piece without contemporary implication. That's just wrong, for the sexual meat rack is still functioning. Yet, even though a tour of the gay tea rooms, back alleys, and sex clubs of any American city will turn up scenes that could have been lifted straight from the film, such scenes won't be playing anytime soon at your local theater. The campaign for gay cinematic respectability has succeeded beyond the wildest dreams of those 1980 protesters. There are many more big-bucks movies with gay characters nowadays; openly gay artists and moneymen are enlisted in their making. But the movies themselves have been assiduously scrubbed to efface the controversial. In steering clear of risk, filmmakers are opting for stupefying solemnity, or else unthreatening silliness, not seriousness, in depicting gay life.

Fifteen years after the initial release of *Cruising*, its depiction of gay sex is still an eye-opener. Even more remarkable, though, is the aesthetic distance between the candor of *Cruising* and what now passes for cinematic gay sex, as well as the distance between that movie's harsh portrayal of antigay state authority and the dearth, these days, of political or social commentary.

Gay sex, if it has any place at all, is offstage in these films, as taboo as blood and gore once was. In the 1994 box office hit *Philadelphia*, Tom Hanks is passionate about the opera while barely managing a hug for his lover. It's as if the act of naming this relationship were bravery enough—as if *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* had been re-made, with Hanks as a gay Sidney Poitier. Other gay-themed movies of the past few years have replaced the simple fact of sex with the agonies of unsatisfied longing. In both *Strawberry and Chocolate* and *An Ordinary Man*, the main character is a feckless, frustrated, asexual homosexual. *The Sum of Us* is a running joke about how a well-meaning, meddlesome dad can undermine his gay son's sex life. A young cleric goes before his congregation in the climactic scene of *Priest*, seeking forgiveness for having had a loving (and fleetingly shown) affair with a man. The lover is banished, the priest restored to celibacy, while a fellow cleric is having it off, entirely unapologetically, with the housekeeper.

Moviemakers are also turning to the cinematic staple of drag as a safe way to portray a slice of gay life. In classics like *Some Like It Hot*, *Victor/Victoria*, *Tootsie*, and *Mrs. Doubtfire*, supposedly straight men were camping it up out of necessity. Now it's acceptable to acknowledge, with toss-off lines like "What in gay hell?", that the drag queen is in fact gay. In Hollywood, courage is measured in such teaspoonfuls. But then and now, the queens spend all their time primping and bitching; they are as neutered as the lawyer in *Philadelphia*. When *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, which featured gay drag queens embarking on a road show in the Australian outback, became a surprise hit last year, Hollywood churned out *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*, which also features gay drag queens on the road, this time in Nebraska. Such gender-bending—like Tom Hanks's being cast as a dying gay man in *Phila-*

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delphia—is unthreateningly make-believe. That's why Hollywood heartthrobs like Matt Dillon and James Spader, who know a good part when they see it, lined up for roles in *Wong Foo*, and why all the leads went to unimpeachably straight actors. It's also the reason that promotion for the film plugged its hyper-heterosexuality, reciting all the leading men from Tony Curtis to Robin Williams who ever put on a dress for the sake of a movie.

When *Cruising* was being filmed, the angry gay voices were outsiders' voices. Although there have been closeted homosexuals in Hollywood for as long as there has been a Hollywood, none spoke up during the brouhaha over *Cruising*. Then, the best that gays could hope for was a director like William Friedkin, who had a reputation for being "gay-sensitive."

The outside has since moved inside. Gay sensibilities—and gay sensitivities—are now built into the process of making a movie. With its portrayal of gay men as secular saints, *Philadelphia* represents an act of contrition on the part of director Jonathan Demme, who had gotten in trouble for depicting the psychopathic killer on the loose in *Silence of the Lambs* as a frustrated homosexual (shades of *Cruising*). Tom Hanks, as the young lawyer fired from a prestigious law firm when the partners suspect he has AIDS, acknowledges having had unsafe sex—but just once, years ago, at a time when, he insists, no one really knew how the AIDS virus was transmitted. That improbable disclaimer is presumably supposed to preserve his innocence.

The script for *Wong Foo* was written by an openly gay man named Douglas Carter Beane. "It's a fun movie," Beane gushes in an interview in the *Advocate*, a national gay newsmagazine, "and when it's all over, you'll feel proud, which is my favorite thing." Beane was floored when Steven Spielberg and Disney Studios got into a bidding war over the script. "They know they're drag queens, right?" Beane remembers wondering. "They don't think they're dragons or dragoons or drag racers?" But *Wong Foo* turned out to be the perfect vehicle for Spielberg. "He had been looking for a long time to address homophobia in America," says Beane. "He wanted to show that there was a place for everyone in America. . . . He also said that he'd just come back from concentration camps in Poland and needed a laugh."

Only a grinch could quarrel with Steven Spielberg's need to chuckle—or, for that matter, with Jonathan Demme's desire to make a film like *Philadelphia* that sands the rough edges of gay life in hopes of reaching, even converting, the kinds of audiences that the critics of *Cruising* had so feared a generation earlier. But what about all the untold tales, accounts of gay lives less perfect than the hero of *Philadelphia*, less hilarious than the drag queens in *Wong Foo*? From the news Hollywood brings, no one would suspect that sex for gay men has become a calculus of intimacy and death. Amid all the gay fluff on the screen, there's no way to detect the political threat, so much more menacing now than during the era of *Cruising*, which threatens Spielberg's faith in "a place for everyone in America." Where is the wake-up call, the art that challenges consciousness, the *Cruising* for our times? □

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Martin Kilson

WILENTZ, WEST, AND BLACK INTELLECTUALS: A REPLY

Let me say straight off that I do not think the Sean Wilentz article "Race, Celebrity, and the Intellectuals" (Summer 1995) warranted publication in *Dissent*. Why? Because of protocol. As a long-time reader of *Dissent* from its start-up days under the deft leadership of Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, I don't ever recall *Dissent*'s publishing reputation-measuring articles on members of its editorial board. Cornel West is one of two African-American members of *Dissent*'s editorial board.

And make no mistake about it, the essential thrust of the Wilentz article was reputation-measuring. It was not, I admit, like the vulgar piece by Leon Wieseltier on Cornel West in the *New Republic*. Wilentz is a more balanced intellectual. Wilentz himself characterizes the Wieseltier article as an assault against West—or at least this is how I interpret his description of Wieseltier's article as "aggressive, even fierce."

Yet there was, I regret to say, a kind of assault on West's reputation in Wilentz's article, because he several times seems to qualify his characterization of Wieseltier's article as "fierce." For example, Wilentz offers the following summation of Wieseltier-on-West: "[H]e finds [West's writings] extremely wanting—contradictory in their pragmatic premises, scatterbrained in their Social Gospel Christianity, and woefully inattentive to matters of moral responsibility." Now I consider these "findings" to be inaccurate. For Wilentz simply to offer this summation of Wieseltier's conclusions without some evaluation of them is, I believe, tantamount to concurrence with them—a kind of concurrence-by-indirection, while ostensibly slapping Wieseltier on the wrist for being "aggressive, even fierce." This non-evaluative summation does not sit well with me.

Alas, Wilentz uses this method twice. He also makes a gratuitous observation about Cornel West in comparison with one of West's mentors—Michael Harrington. "West has not written anything nearly as politically effective as Harrington's best work," says Wilentz, "although he might do so if he allows himself the time. But that will not be easy, and not just because of his habit of speaking and writing all over the map."

This is nonsense. Sean Wilentz has no special insight as to whether Cornel West will or will not find it easy to produce works as politically effective as Harrington's. And why is speaking and writing all over the place an intrinsic barrier to producing good and effective intellectual work anyway? Some people can do it. Some people write all over the map and produce effective work—such as *Dissent*'s editor Michael Walzer, Garry Wills, Nathan Glazer, the late C.L.R. James, and Edward Said, to name a few. Some people speak and write all over the map and produce effective work too—such as Frances Fox Piven, the late Christopher Lasch, Stuart Hall, the late E.P. Thompson, and Noam Chomsky. In short, Sean Wilentz's comparison of Cornel West and Michael Harrington is spurious, since the premises from which it is made are groundless.

In the course of his article, Wilentz migrates between a poorly disguised critique of Cornel West and the pretense of defending African-American intellectuals against having their intellectual discourse artificially squeezed into the straitjacket of what Wilentz calls "a racialist story line." Such squeezing, Wilentz asserts, is a habit of overzealous left-liberal and leftist commentators on black intellectuals. For Wilentz, this

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amounts to a veritable "ghettoization"—an overemphasis on the black-connectedness of their discourse and thus on its systemic critique (that is, the critique of the longstanding white-supremacist victimization and marginalization of African Americans and the significance of this in American life). Now Wilentz wants to make the point that neoliberal progressives are always anxious to make these days about African-American political discourse—namely, it has diversified, it is no longer mainly defined by black-connectedness and radical criticism. We now have Stanley Crouch, Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, Carol Swain, and some others not quite as conservative in their black diversification perhaps—Stephen Carter, Orlando Patterson (though Patterson is moving back to a critical mode), and so forth. Conservatives (old and new) join neoliberals like Wilentz in pointing out this diversification. But Wilentz and those who follow him in this are wrong. The fact of the matter is that the work and discourse of most African-American intellectuals are inspired by black realities, especially the role of white supremacist patterns vis-à-vis those realities. The vast majority of black intellectuals are, I think, comfortable with this and don't consider their activity "ghettoized." They believe there are aesthetic, moral, ethical, and systemic lessons for American society as a whole (for the human condition, in fact) that can be derived from using black realities as the groundwork for intellectual and scholarly activity—just as Irish realities, Jewish realities, Hispanic realities, women's realities, gay realities, and so forth can be similarly employed. Wilentz should know this.

So, yes, there is in this system-critical mode of most African-American intellectuals a "racialist story line." And if left-liberal or leftist commentators (mainly white) on black intellectuals—like Michael Bérubé—have been pointing this out, they are not wrong. Neoliberals like Sean Wilentz and Ellen Willis clearly prefer to tune in to more "authentic" voices—Shelby Steele, Stanley Crouch, and so forth—because, from Wilentz's perspective, the "racialist story line" is mistaken. So Wilentz comes forth with a certain neoliberal arrogance, informing African-American intellectuals that either we are being influenced from within our own ranks by individuals who brandish unwarranted badges of intellectual achievement or we are being patronized (manipulated) by presumably sympathetic left or left-liberal white commentators.

Put another way, Wilentz is informing African-American intellectuals that our "racial politics" discourse is out of step with post-civil rights era America—what neoliberals like Wilentz consider a "colorblind society" or at least a society that seriously endeavors in that direction, as if America's longstanding white supremacist hegemony has left no enduring marks on the souls and life chances of black folks. Or, if there are any such marks, the winds of change set in motion by the civil rights legislation of the late 1960s will soon eradicate them. For Wilentz, then, intellectual discourse connected with "racial politics" borders on distortion.

Thus in Sean Wilentz's neoliberal scheme of things, neither Cornel West's general range of intellectual work nor his book *Race Matters* amount to very much. Of course, Sean Wilentz has a right to his perspective on West as an intellectual. But Wilentz's article does not belong in *Dissent*. To my mind, both he (an editorial board member of *Dissent* along with Cornel West) and the editors of *Dissent* erred badly in this matter.

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Sean Wilentz Responds

The aim of my essay was not to measure reputations, as Martin Kilson claims. The aim was to assess how reputations get measured these days. The essay grew from my dismay at how the conceits of celebrity journalism have increasingly garbled public presentation of ideas and politics. The garbling occurs on many fronts, but it has been especially damaging in the coverage of two overlapping areas: the new pop world of postmodern academia and the writings of the so-called "new black intellectuals." I mentioned the first in passing, but concentrated on the second, where I believe the intellectual and political stakes are much greater.

Near the essay's conclusion, I discussed the recent controversy over Cornel West's writings, as an example of how, paradoxically, even tough-minded critics who try to look beyond the celebrity hype can wind up getting misled. What Kilson describes, with some highly selective quotations, as my attempt to launch "a kind of assault on West's reputation" was actually a defense of West's efforts as a self-described "organic intellectual"—a sincere defense that applauded what I thought were West's main contentions about moral responsibility and the political situation of the black American poor. With some reservations, the essay likened West's abilities and ambitions to those of Michael Harrington—the highest sort of praise of a politically engaged writer that I can imagine, especially coming in this magazine. Kilson records the reservations and ignores the rest; and he obscures my basic point, which had to do with the state of current intellectual journalism and not with West's status or achievements.

I did not attempt to discuss all of the criticisms directed at West—as I say, the essay was not primarily about him—but stuck to what I thought were the most important criticisms, about which I could write with a plausible measure of authority. For myself, as an interested reader (and as West's friend, former academic colleague, and fellow *Dissent* editor), I hope that he will go on to write something on a par with *The Black Jacobins* or *The Other America*. My point, though, was neither to predict nor to dictate West's future, but rather to reflect on how the celebrity razzle-dazzle of today's intellectual scene makes that job more difficult.

On some important broader issues, Kilson fabricates a hidden agenda on my part, and imputes to me views that I do not hold. Merely to note the existence of writers like Thomas Sowell is not the same thing as endorsing their ideas or claiming that their voices are more "authentic" than those of other black writers. (Can't we, at long last, dispense with the whole idea of racial authenticity?) As I have said elsewhere, I think that the notion of a "color-blind" America—a notion once proclaimed by the civil rights movement but since adopted and distorted by conservatives—is chimerical. Rather, as I suggested in my *Dissent* essay, I believe in an integrated America where different skin colors are no longer badges of inequality, an America radically different from our own, for blacks *and* whites *and* everyone else. Representative John Lewis recently remarked that he sometimes feels like a square when he talks to people about the ideals of interracial democracy and the Beloved Community. I know what he means, but this is where I stand.

I suspect that, deep down, Kilson and I actually agree about these matters more than we differ. Still, I have to wonder, especially given some of the ideological labels that he tries to pin on other authors. Carol Swain, for example, has written about the necessity of biracial electoral coalitions, and has raised serious questions about the pitfalls of race-based gerrymandering. Does this really make her a *conservative*, as Kilson describes her? Although I greatly admire Ellen Willis and am always delighted to be in her company (whatever our differences), I doubt that her loyal readers ever expected that she would be lumped with anyone as a neoliberal. And if believing in integration makes me a neoliberal, so be it—but Kilson should know that he is in danger of dismissing many more erstwhile allies, black and white, besides me.

No critic to the left of Dinesh D'Souza would

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claim that black writers have not derived great moral, aesthetic, and "systemic" lessons from the experience of black America, including the experience of white racism. (In fact, even D'Souza allows as much.) Nor can anybody deny that black American writers have been inescapably drawn to the themes of black history and life. But that is not *all* that black writers have been drawn to, either now or in the past. Not only do authors like Stephen Carter, Stanley Crouch, *and* Cornel West also write about other matters; as Ralph Ellison, Albert Murray, and others have observed, it is difficult to write well about black America without also writing about white America, and vice versa, since the two Americas have helped to define each other, and to define the country at large.

Although Kilson sees "black realities" as addressing the larger human condition, he also sounds as if he backs the common assumption that unless black writing analyzes and protests racial injustice, it is deficient, lacking in sufficient racial "connectedness." This assumption is so provincial that it cannot be right.

Kilson's remarks about authorial racial, ethnic, and sexual identity fit today's fashions, but they overloook the plain fact that many black writers (and not just "conservatives") have been rejecting pat racial identities without acquiescing in white racism. Kilson's fixation on identity also overlooks that blacks have not been alone in writing superbly about black themes, or in stimulating other writers of all colors to do so. Nor does Kilson's reply consider how recent black writers have escaped the Jim Crow isolation that was imposed on their forerunners, only to find themselves competing for the "black" market niche.

Beneath the surface of our quarrel, I think that Kilson and I have a very specific and sharp disagreement over what he calls "black-connectedness and radical criticism" and their links to the celebrity cult. In the same issue of *Dissent* where my original essay appeared, Kilson contributed an essay of his own, defending the efforts of black radicals and reformers to strike tactical alliances with racist authoritarians like Louis Farrakhan and Khalid Muhammad—figures he described, with an unnerving academic detachment, as xenophobic, Afrocentric "ethno-radicals." Kilson made it clear that he abhors these people's "mean and twisted" views, and he fretted that alliances with them might prove "counter-productive to long-run democratic purposes." But in the end, he suppressed his fears and pointed out that the ethno-radicals' offer of "catharsis," along with their "massive entertainment value," have made them popular among inner-city blacks. Farrakhan and company have charisma; they really know how to draw a crowd; they talk about some important issues; and so, Kilson argued, it makes sense for mainstream black leaders to build "odd-bedfellow" ties with them—"ties aimed at a specific task of coping with the runaway drug crisis and criminal crisis in inner-city black communities."

Looking back, Kilson's essay reads like a prospective defense of the Million Man March, an event that has given Farrakhan a degree of legitimacy and power unimaginable until now. Kilson's tortured logic (which likens embracing Farrakhan to forging the New Deal) displays a startling political naiveté. The outcome of that logic is, in my view, ominous. But it also speaks directly to the issues of this exchange.

Amid recent events, the lure of celebrity, catharsis, and drawing-power—and, at times, the vaunting of a purely racial solidarity—has clouded over what used to be fundamental principles and aspirations of the democratic left and the civil rights movement. And although the Million Man March has touched off a vigorous debate, it has also occasioned a good deal of commentary in the high-profile celebrity mode: judging the day's events (including Farrakhan's oratory) strictly on the grounds of their artfulness, enthusiasm, and camaraderie—their *style*—and gliding over their political content. Talk of black leadership has turned to discussion of black male charisma, of who best grabs the public's attention, with little visible consideration of programs and policies. Instead of democratic politics, we get a jolt of Garveyite messianism and the old authoritatian rhetoric of revitalization: one more counternarrative. It is all very different from what I had understood as Cornel West's call for a new "politics of conversion" that, in West's words, "shuns the limelight—a limelight that

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solicits status seekers and egomaniacs."

It was my worries about these sorts of things that prompted my original essay, not a hidden desire to attack Cornel West's reputation or to promote conservative writers. I am much more worried today than I was six months ago. Still, I appreciate Martin Kilson's willingness to raise his voice. Now, more than ever, each of us (and especially *Dissent*'s editors) needs to air his or her views fully and forcefully, to check our consciences and then move on.

November 16, 1995

Michael Walzer Comments

I am not going to join the argument between Sean Wilentz and Martin Kilson, both of whom are fellow editors and friends of mine. But I do want to say in response to Kilson that I am glad that the argument takes place in these pages. The issues are hard even when they aren't personally focused, but they are, as we all know, the stuff of everyday conversation among liberal and left intellectuals, and they require public airing. The air won't clear until we acknowledge the clouds.

Dissent's editorial policy with regard to arguments of this sort has not changed. We do not review books by editors, but no writer for the magazine is barred from criticizing the public work or political positions of *Dissent* editors or from joining debates in which they are involved. A useful example of this kind of inner-*Dissent* criticism is provided by Marty Kilson himself, in his sharp attack on Jim Sleeper, another member of our editorial board, in the Fall 1991 issue of the magazine. Several other editors wanted to cut the attack out of Kilson's article, but he insisted that it be included in the published version, as it properly was. □

THE MILLION MAN MARCH

In order to open a discussion of the Million Man March held in Washington, D.C., last October, we decided to reprint Cornel West's op-ed piece from the New York Times, *written and published on the eve of the march, together with a critical response by Michael Walzer, written a few weeks later. Cornel West was invited to respond to the critique, but no reply was received by our printer's deadline. We hope to continue this discussion at a later date and with a more general reference to racial politics in American life.*—EDS.

Cornel West

On Monday, maybe a million black men will march on Washington. Coming after the O. J. Simpson verdict, the march promises to be a pivotal moment in our nation's life. As the writer Greg Tate has rightly noted, the verdict "may represent the first time in history that a majority black jury has wielded an apparatus of state power against the will of the nation's white citizenry."

Our fragile civic and legal order, with its precious jury system that does not guarantee justice, must now contend with a level of white rage unprecedented in American history. Needless to say, black rage has risen exponentially since bul-

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lets ripped through the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. Can our deeply divided society wrestle with this challenge without exploding?

For most whites, the Million Man March called by Minister Louis Farrakhan can only worsen race matters. For them, he not only embodies black rage but also black hatred and contempt for whites, Jews, women, gay men, and lesbians. Building on a long and diverse tradition of black nationalism—Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Queen Mother Moore, Malcolm X—Minister Farrakhan is white America's worst nightmare.

Why am I supporting the march? After all, I am a radical democrat devoted to a downward redistribution of wealth and a Christian freedom-fighter in the King legacy—which condemns any xenophobia, including patriarchy, homophobia, and anti-Semitism.

First, unlike "color-blind" neoliberals and conservatives who cheaply invoke Dr. King's words even as they kill the substance and spirit of his radical message, I take his last efforts seriously. When Dr. King was killed, not only was he working on the multiracial poor people's campaign, he was also meeting with Elijah Muhammad and Amiri Baraka—black nationalists demonized by the white media—to promote black operational unity.

Dr. King sought to use moral and political means to transform the capitalist structure of society while deepening its democratic one. But he realistically assessed the true depth of white supremacy. In short, Dr. King, the integrationist, had no fear of a black united front and no hatred of black nationalists.

The second reason I march: although Minister Farrakhan—with whom I have deep disagreements—initiated this demonstration, the demonstration is about matters much bigger than he is. I have in mind the general invisibility of, and indifference to, black sadness, sorrow, and social misery, and the disrespect and disregard in which blacks are held in America and abroad. We agree on highlighting black suffering.

In casting the demonstration as "Farrakhan's march," the mainstream media want to shift the focus from black pain to white anxiety. The media distort and disparage the motivations of most blacks who will march—men who are deeply concerned about black suffering and are outraged at the nation's right-wing turn yet are neither Nation of Islam members nor Farrakhan followers. No one man is the leader of black America—and most of its best leaders are black women.

Third, I must march because the next major battle in the struggle for black freedom involves moral and political channeling of the overwhelming black rage and despair. To stand on the sidelines and yield the terrain to Minister Farrakhan and other black nationalists would be to forsake not only my King legacy but, more importantly, my love for black people. Young blacks are hungry for vision, analysis, and action; radical democrats must go to them and be with them.

I believe that if white supremacy can be reduced to a minimum, then patriarchy, homophobia, and anti-Semitism can be lessened in black America.

If I am wrong, America has no desirable future. If I am right, black operational unity need not preclude multiracial democratic movements that target all forms of racism and corporate power. Whether right or wrong, I must fight. So I march.

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Michael Walzer

A lot of good people came to Washington last October 16. Surveys published afterward suggest that the "million men," whatever their actual number, were a substantial representation of the African-American working class and middle class (except that both these groups are

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Christopher Smith/IMPACT VISUALS

known to include women). Though they solemnly swore to give up violence and drugs, it is unlikely that many of these men were violent or addicted or ever had been. They took the oath, they atoned, on behalf of the others, who weren't there. These were the already uplifted—earnest, dignified, worried (with good reason) but glad to be in Washington in such large numbers, and a little uncertain about what was meant to follow from their unity.

But the political character of a march is not determined by the moral character of the marchers. It is determined instead by the organizations that sponsor, and even more obviously by the organizations that control, the march: that provide the marshals, write and distribute the literature, hold the press conferences, choose the speakers. One of the surprises of this march was that sponsoring and supporting organizations—like the Congressional Black Caucus—made no bid at all for a share in controlling it. Nor did the sponsoring individuals, with nothing to contribute but their names, exercise any control. Nor did the warm-up speakers, who seem to have agreed to speak without asking any questions about the setting in which they would be heard. The politics of the march was wholly determined by Louis Farrakhan and his Nation of Islam. There was a lot of talk before the march about its "many leaders." But no such plurality was visible on October 16 or in the weeks afterward.

Farrakhan's singular role, Cornel West says in his *New York Times* piece, was only a media artifact. I don't think so. My sense of both the television people and the print and radio journalists, before and since the march, is that they were and are looking for alternative figures—if only in the hope of fireworks. But there was no one inside the march who was prepared to challenge Farrakhan directly or to speak for all the people who came despite and not because of his call. And the opposition voices outside were mostly dissident voices: we know their tone because it is ours also, and it has never attracted very much media attention. A few black political figures—liberals and leftists like Julian Bond, John Lewis, Major Owens—bravely opposed the march. But they spoke one by one; they didn't come together and find in their unity the political power and moral strength to tell black Ameri-

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Major R. Owens

WHY I'M NOT MARCHING

The following are excerpts from a statement made on the eve of the Million Man March by Representative Major R. Owens (D-N.Y.), a leading figure in the Congressional Black Caucus.—EDS.

In my activist bones something always makes me yearn to support a demonstration or a march. And certainly, given the unrelenting attack on public policies that benefit the majority of blacks, there is an urge to applaud any nonviolent action whose target is the Gingrich high-tech barbarians. As a manifestation of massive people empowerment, a March on Washington by the Caring Majority could be very much in order and long overdue.

But October 16 is not a Caring Majority march. Is Minister Louis Farrakhan's march focused on the current outrages of the Washington Republican majority? Is the anger of this march targeted at legislation that will eradicate the entitlement of all children, including black children, to receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children? Are the organizers denouncing proposals to eradicate the entitlement for Medicaid? Are the idealistic youth headed for Washington being told by the March's organizers that they should vent their rage at those who have cut billions of dollars from low-income housing, job training, education, and other vital programs? Unfortunately, the overall answer to these questions is "NO."

Despite my activist instincts, I refuse to participate in this march because its agenda is purposefully shrouded with contradictions and conflicting messages. As a political leader, I cannot endorse and engage in an activity whose organizers call loudly for ecumenical and united action but who thrive on autocratic planning and decision making. I cannot agree to blind, unconditional unity with those whose slogans and platforms have been consistently reckless and divisive. I cannot support a major statement by a group whose isolationist posture and separatist strategy pose long-term threats to the African-American community . . . .

This march is a golden opportunity to send a powerful message to America. But this march is Minister Louis Farrakhan's march. His picture has been on every recruitment poster . . . . He could have used this platform to truly unify Black America by endorsing the ideals and principles that place the African-American community on the very highest moral ground. Farrakhan could have wiped out the past and taken a great leap forward by following the example of Nelson Mandela in denouncing all racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, and other religious bigotry, homophobia, prejudice, immigrant-bashing, and oppression of the poor . . . . [But] basic steps to establish an environment that rejects bigotry and anti-Semitism have been rejected. Farrakhan's speeches trumpeting the charge of "bloodsuckers" have grown more shrill . . . .

A dangerous and harmful message from this march is guaranteed when a leadership role is taken by an unrepentant Khalid Muhammad [Farrakhan's aide—EDS.], who emphasized that the presence of black men in Washington is for the purpose of "atoning" for their sins ("against black women and their families"). Speaker Gingrich and his high-tech barbarians will welcome such a "confession.". . . This "atoning" validates the repeated Republican attacks on the black community. If the sins of black men are the problem, then 232 years of slavery and a hundred years of brutal oppression after slavery are not part of the problem . . . .

Not sin, but public policies, laws, regulations, and actions must be our primary concern. No one should ever underestimate the role of personal morality in human affairs. We know that individuals are ultimately the masters of their own fates. But it is the duty of our government to facilitate positive development, for our citizens, for their families. Public policies must always strive to remove as many obstacles as possible to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The Nation of Islam simplifies the problems of our complex society; it allows those in power both to wash their hands and to forget the problems they have created . . . . □

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cans and Americans in general why the march was wrong—and to make them listen.

The march was a political disaster for the left. For all the vague hopes expressed on the day, these are its two most important results: (1) It crowned Farrakhan as the most effective leader of black America and it revealed the virtual abdication of everyone else. For all his lunatic numerologies, Farrakhan knows what he is doing. He is disciplined and ruthless, while the others, with brave exceptions like the ones I've noted, look naive and self-indulgent. Adolph Reed writes in the *Village Voice* that he is glad of Farrakhan's anti-Semitism because only this prevents him from playing the large political role to which he obviously aspires. Maybe so, but we have to consider the opposite hypothesis: that Farrakhan's anti-Semitism, racism, sexism, and homophobia have been crucial to his success so far. His obsessions resonate with his audience—which at least begins to explain why so many other black "leaders" have hesitated so long to take him on.

(2) The march established nationalism and some kind of moral rearmament as a substitute for civil rights politics. What happened in Washington in October was astonishing: a far right rally led by a man with obvious authoritarian and autocratic ambitions—and the black left hopelessly divided between criticism and eager participation. But how could participants like Cornel West miss the overt politics of the march? How can they justify it now? They are focused, they say, on the peaceful, sober, and mostly convivial mass; but they need to focus instead on the organizational structure and the actual events. With regard to what *happened* at the march, Farrakhan made no concessions to anyone. The marshals were his cadres, uniformed in his approved style, rigid with ideological rectitude, chanting, on cue, "We love Louis Farrakhan." The literature was his own, no one else's. Major Owens told his friends that if they went to Washington they should carry their own banners, distribute their own leaflets: not many people seem to have done that (so far as I can tell, no one else was telling them to do that). And Farrakhan spoke for two and a half hours, five times as long as anyone else: the demagogue triumphant. At press conferences before the march, Benjamin Chavis insisted on Farrakhan's leading role; at press conferences afterward, Farrakhan himself claimed that role. The messenger, he rightly insisted, is the message—especially so when prophet and prophecy come alike from God!

Again, how can people who are or have been on the left support this sort of thing? They marched, they say, in solidarity with the other marchers. But it isn't an example of solidarity with the people when left intellectuals join a procession behind the Pied Piper—even less, when they skip along at the piper's side, telling the rest of us that, though they have "deep disagreements" with the piper, there is no one else who can draw such a crowd (and he really is a wonderful musician). Left intellectuals owe the people a more critical solidarity: they must say what the disagreements are and why they are deep. If they forget the criticism so as to make the solidarity easier, they move onto dangerous ground. We have been there before: that is the ground across which many socialists and syndicalists drifted in the 1920s . . . on their way to fascism. They were excited by the camaraderie of the rallies, the crowds, the uniforms, the flags, the fierce oratory.

Suppose there had been a solid wall of opposition to Farrakhan by left and liberal blacks. Where would we be today? The movements born in the 1960s have looked exhausted in recent years, without ideas, unable to respond to the crisis of the inner cities and the desperation of their inhabitants. But maybe this act of opposition would have galvanized them, forced their activists to think freshly about their politics, their alliances, even their rhetoric—forced on them the same internal reform that we saw, also in October, in the labor movement. Maybe. But there were only the dissident voices, nothing like a wall of opposition, and we are left in open space, a political desert, alone with the Pied Piper. □

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Mark Levinson

A WEAK STANDARD

Last spring and summer, as Newt Gingrich and his followers gleefully set about dismantling what remained of the American welfare state, there were many stories in the press about the debut of the conservative magazine the *Weekly Standard*.

For those who attempt to keep informed, it was hard to get excited. Conservative publications jam the newsstands. There is the *Wall Street Journal*, the *American Spectator*, *National Review*, the *Public Interest*, *Commentary*, the *National Interest*, *Policy Review*, the *City Journal* and, as often as not, the *New Republic*.

Many conservatives, it seems, were disturbed by reports that the *New Republic* was the magazine most widely read in the Reagan White House (liberals felt the same discomfort). So despite the crowded field, William Kristol, ex-chief of staff to Dan Quayle, John Podhoretz, ex-Bush speech writer, and *New Republic* editor Fred Barnes decided to launch a new conservative magazine, which would be modeled, in part, on the *New Republic*.

They chose the *New Republic* as a model because of its reputation for being unpredictable, interesting, readable. Yet the *Standard* would be different. The *New Republic*, despite its conservative turn, was not "of" the conservative movement. The *Standard* would be a real conservative magazine.

Launching a magazine is difficult. The start-up costs alone are enormous. But America is a free country. All you have to do is work hard and pull yourself up by your bootstraps. In Newt Gingrich's America, however, the sun shines on things right. According to press reports the three editors had a few discussions, approached media mogul Rupert Murdoch, and came away with his pledge to finance the *Standard* for at least three years, *starting* with an investment of several million dollars.

The *Weekly Standard* is edited by William Kristol, reputed to be among the Republican party's keenest strategists. The *New Yorker* remarked that in the conservative movement Kristol occupies "the sort of ideological primacy that Mikhail (the Grey Cardinal) Suslov occupied under Leonid Brezhnev." Among his many insights, he is perhaps best known for pointing out that "there is no health care crisis in the United States." Shortly after he made that statement it was reported that the number of people without health insurance in the United States increased from thirty-seven to more than forty million people.

An editorial in the first issue declared that the 1994 mid-term elections were the start of a lasting Republican realignment and that the *Standard* will "speak for, interpret and guide this realignment." The editorial went on to say that the public approved of the current Republican Congress 52-35 in the latest polls. That was September 18. But Americans have been known to change their minds. As I write in late November the public *disapproves* of Congress by roughly those same numbers. Perhaps those guiding the Republican Congress have been giving faulty directions.

Whatever the public thinks of Congress, conservatism is ascendant. Conservatives are in power and, as a consequence, they don't have to think very hard. The editors of the *Standard* have not had to struggle to bring intellectual coherence to conservative ideology. That was done by

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their parents. Nor do they attempt to question the underlying political assumptions of their inherited ideology. In the pages of the *Standard* you can see conservatism suffering the kind of mental laziness that characterized liberalism several decades ago.

Week after week the *Standard* fills its pages with conventional conservative wisdom. Government is bad. Tax cuts are good. Affirmative action is bad. Block grants are good. Most articles are drearily predictable, for example, "Three Cheers For the Tax Cut," "Bob Dole's Resilience," "Are the Democrats Going Nuts?" and "Bill Clinton's Pathetic Lies." There are attempts at controversy, such as the *Standard's* dispute with the *Wall Street Journal* over whether or not the Republicans should support a budget compromise, or Kristol's support of Colin Powell for president. There is strategic advice:

> The GOP's final remaining challenge this year will be producing the Medicare growth reductions [Never say cuts!—ML] necessary to achieve all the other policy goals embedded in its budget, while at the same time retaining a level of broad popular support that will allow conservatives to expand those achievements in the future.

And weekly updates on developments in Washington:

> In the late afternoon of November 8, Bill Clinton met with advisers in the Oval Office to discuss an analysis of the Senate's welfare legislation by the Office of Management and Budget. The study indicated that the bill—which Clinton was on the record as supporting—would push an additional 1.2 million children into poverty. That figure, coming after immense pressure on the White House from liberals to oppose Republican welfare reform, prompted Clinton to backtrack. . . . The president's reversal reflects the administration's deep division over welfare.

One could find this in the *New York Times*. And that's the problem with the *Weekly Standard*. It has no reason for being. A typical issue consists of articles that could be characterized as the best of the *American Spectator*, the worst of the *New Republic*, too specific for *Commentary*, too short for the *Public Interest*. Almost every piece could have appeared in the *National Review*. Come to think of it, who appointed these guys leaders of the Republican revolution anyway?

The *Standard* has a very brief shelf life—hardly anything that appeared in the first ten issues remains worth reading today. There are a few exceptions. Charles Krauthammer's critique of Newt Gingrich's book *To Renew America* is the only piece that asks the question: what is conservatism? Gingrich, he says,

> really is that oxymoron, the conservative revolutionary. . . . In his acceptance speech as Speaker, he proclaimed the goal of the conservative revolution of 1994 as not just political . . . but meta-political: the manufacture of a new society. . . . Conservatism

dissent

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396 Ave. of the Americas, 10011

EASTERN LOBBY SHOPS
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200 Park Ave., 10017

BRENTANO'S
597 Fifth Ave., 10017

DOUBLEDAY BOOK SHOPS
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BARNES & NOBLE SUPERSTORE
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EASTERN LOBBY SHOPS
World Trade Center No. 2
1 World Trade Center, 10048

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cannot be revolutionary in anything but the more limited "negative" sense of radically stripping away the encumbrances of the welfare state. Conservatives do not need a more "positive" vision other than the faith that, with these encumbrances removed, native American genius will flourish, and civil society, freed from the grip of the state, will renew itself. What new society this will yield, we do not know. Conservatives believe such things unknowable.

The only other piece that takes a critical view of currently fashionable conservative beliefs was Glenn Loury's dissection of Dinesh D'Souza's *End of Racism*.

> I reject, wholeheartedly and with intense fervor, his effort to draw a moral line down through the heart of my country, placing those he deems civilized on one side, and leaving the barbaric to the other. Is it not a measure of the quality of *American* civilization that so many of our "brothers and sisters," of all colors, live amidst squalor, in hopelessness and despair? D'Souza has not one useful word to say about how this problem will be remedied beyond urging blacks in the middle class to get busy raising the "civilizational standards" of their brethren. As someone who has spent a decade calling for moral leadership within the black community, I find it now an even more important task to urge that responsible moral leadership come forth in the "conservative community."

It doesn't matter whether Loury and Krauthammer are correct. They raise fundamental questions. That alone makes their articles stand out in the *Standard*.

One should read the *Weekly Standard* if only to understand the coming crisis of conservatism. The conservative program, or some version of it, will be enacted. As a consequence, our social-economic problems will grow deeper, and sooner or later, people will demand that something be done. The *Standard* will have little to say; no, it will have little *new* to say. Its editors are not thinking seriously about the problems confronting our society. "Stupidity," Milan Kundera wrote, "is not ignorance but the nonthought of received ideas." □

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Eric Foner

RACE AND THE CONSERVATIVES

THE END OF RACISM: PRINCIPLES FOR A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY, by Dinesh D'Souza. The Free Press, 1995. 736 pp., $30.00.

The End of Racism is an ambitious book. It seeks to demonstrate that liberal policies and the culture and behavior of African Americans, rather than racism, lie at the root of black Americans' problems. It attempts to dismantle pragmatism and cultural relativism, central elements of twentieth-century thought, in favor of the nineteenth-century idea that cultures exist within a fixed hierarchy ranging from savage to civilized, atop which sits Western civilization. It tries to rewrite American history by demonstrating that slavery and segregation were far less racist and oppressive than is generally supposed.

The scope of the book's ambition is matched only by the extent of its failure. Its account of history is misleading, its discussion of world cultures sophomoric, its analysis of current race relations simplistic. Beneath a façade of reasonableness, *The End of Racism* is a mean-spirited polemic whose constant allusions to "failure," "incapacity," and the "breakdown of civilization" among blacks pander to the basest prejudices of its readership. It contains truly outrageous assertions, such as that blacks owe American society a debt of gratitude for slavery, which brought them "into the orbit of modern civilization and Western freedom." Despite the author's claim courageously to speak the "unspeakable" and offer a startling new outlook, his prescriptions consist of familiar conservative bromides—an end to affirmative action, faith that the free market will solve all social problems, a call for blacks to prove themselves worthy of equal treatment.

Born in India and educated at an elite Jesuit school, Dinesh D'Souza came to the United States as a teenager and went on to attend Dartmouth, where as editor of the *Dartmouth Review* he became the darling of conservatives. His first book, *Illiberal Education*, strung together a series of anecdotes and incidents (many, it turned out, described inaccurately) to demonstrate that politically correct radicals had taken over American universities. He went on to become a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, where this book was written.

Although D'Souza seems unaware of it, *The End of Racism* belongs to a genre that has long flourished in this country, one proclaiming the shortcomings of the character and intellect of black Americans. Two centuries ago, Thomas Jefferson wrote that blacks were inferior to whites in physical and mental capabilities. (Jefferson admitted to a certain diffidence about advancing arguments that might wrongly degrade an entire race of people; no such hesitation deters D'Souza.) Antebellum southern writers produced innumerable works demonstrating blacks' innate suitability for slavery. In the 1890s, as the nation retreated from its Reconstruction commitment to racial equality, prominent white educators and reformers gathered at Lake Mohonk for conferences on the "Negro Question," and concluded that blacks' problem was deficient "personal conduct and character," and that self-help, not national assistance or political agitation, offered the best route to racial progress. Similar works in this century legiti-

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mated segregation and disenfranchisement. Like these predecessors and many others, D'Souza's investigation ends up blaming blacks for their own condition and justifying national indifference to racial inequality.

Despite weighing in at nearly 600 pages of text and 140 of footnotes, *The End of Racism* is both superficial and endlessly repetitious, and its main arguments do not take long to summarize. Racism, which D'Souza defines as belief in the innate biological inferiority of certain racially defined groups, arose in the early modern era as an explanation among Europeans for the backwardness of societies they encountered in Africa, Asia, and the New World. Early in this century, the anthropologist Franz Boas and his students undermined the intellectual justification for racism by explaining the "civilization gap" between whites and nonwhites on the basis of history, environment, and culture, not innate inferiority. The "Boasian ideology" of cultural relativism played a useful role in discrediting racism, but also, D'Souza insists (caricaturing the idea so as to make it unrecognizable) meant the end of any absolute values or standards of judgment. Relativists, he claims, believe that all behavior, however pathological, must be respected and that no culture has the right to criticize another. Poor Boas: D'Souza holds him responsible for virtually every ill of modern society, from Afrocentrism, multiculturalism, and affirmative action to America's economic difficulties (since firms forced to hire culturally backward employees cannot compete effectively in the world market) and even the "new white racism" of David Duke (as valid an outlook as any other to relativists).

Fortunately, says D'Souza, discrimination based on the belief in biological inferiority has disappeared. David Duke has been "marginalized." (Actually, Duke received a majority of the white vote when he ran for governor of Louisiana, and *The Bell Curve*, whose arguments on the relationship of race, genetics, and intelligence fit D'Souza's description of the "old" racism, was a best-seller.) The belief that racism persists is a myth invented by the black civil rights establishment. What discrimination takes place today is a "rational response to black group traits"—illegitimacy, criminality, and a desire to live off the government rather than work. Employers who refuse to hire blacks or banks that decline to offer them mortgages are obeying the law of averages, not acting on racial prejudice.

Indeed, D'Souza favors the repeal of laws barring discrimination, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, so that firms and individuals can act on the basis of real differences between groups. Of course, some talented blacks may be unfairly denied opportunity, but one can hardly expect prospective employers to investigate closely the qualifications of each job applicant; race is a readily available proxy for individual capacity. The only way to end such discrimination is for blacks to shape up and abandon their pathological behavior. For a conservative attuned to the sanctity of individual rights and advancement based on merit—hence his attack on affirmative action and sympathy for its "thousands" of white victims—D'Souza is oddly indifferent to the social costs and individual injustice that would arise from unleashing "rational discrimination" as he proposes. Nor does history support his argument—based on laissez-faire ideology rather than any investigation of the facts—that employers in a market economy will find unwarranted discrimination inefficient. The free market has never been an equal opportunity employer. Private industry happily cooperated with and benefited from the segregation and disenfranchisement of blacks, and businessmen throughout American history have garnered profits from the relegation of black workers to menial, low-paid employment.

Framing D'Souza's argument about the present is a misconceived account of American and world history. Space does not allow a full examination of the book's numerous inaccuracies (a task that has been assayed at greater length in devastating critiques by George Fredrickson in the *New York Review of Books* and Sean Wilentz in the *New Yorker*). But a few observations are in order.

D'Souza fails to understand that racism has always flourished as part and parcel of a system of power. Europeans did not encounter other cultures as tourists or disinterested scientific investigators. Racism arose not simply to explain difference but to justify conquest, colonization,

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enslavement, and economic domination. Throughout the book, D'Souza describes racism as nothing more than an "opinion," a "point of view." He thus fails to see how historically it has been embedded in unequal power relations between groups defined as races.

D'Souza's account of American slavery begins with the truism that slavery has existed in many societies without resting on racial difference. From this, and the fact that a handful of free blacks owned slaves, he concludes that slavery in the United States was not a racist institution. This argument is so absurd that he subsequently abandons it, referring to America's "racial slavery." But it allows him to argue that the Constitution was an antislavery document that respected the basic rights of slaves (an idea that would have surprised the Founding Fathers).

D'Souza seems incapable of viewing black Americans as actors in the nation's history. Blacks should be grateful that white America freed the slaves "on its own initiative"—an odd way of describing a Civil War that left over six hundred thousand Americans dead, and in which blacks played a major part. Indeed, D'Souza argues, while slavery has existed everywhere, only the West developed the idea of a natural right to freedom. He ignores Orlando Patterson's powerful demonstration that slaves themselves originated the notion of freedom as a universal right, as well as the fact that the first large-scale emancipation in this hemisphere occurred in Haiti, as a result of a slave insurrection by men and women mostly born in Africa. Later, D'Souza credits streetcar companies with organizing opposition to segregation around the turn of the century, ignoring the far larger black movement against these laws. He calls Boas the "founder of American antiracism," apparently unaware that long before Boas, black and white abolitionists had challenged the premises of biological racism. D'Souza credits Martin Luther King, Jr., with "almost single-handedly" bringing down segregation; it is apparently inconceivable to him that ordinary blacks had something to do with this history.

Since racism has somehow disappeared, the main relevance of history for D'Souza lies in the culture blacks developed under slavery, to whose survival he attributes their current problems. It was perfectly logical for slaves to sympathize with criminals, denigrate hard work, take little interest in education, and, during and after the Civil War, look to the federal government for protection and advancement. But this culture, dysfunctional in a free society based on open competition and limited government, today cripples black efforts at advancement and has spawned the illegitimacy, criminality, and hostility to hard work and educational advancement that, according to him, characterizes black America. (He also argues, however, that these "pathologies" did not arise until the last thirty years; evidently the culture of slavery lay dormant for a century until unleashed by liberal "permissiveness.")

D'Souza never pauses to contemplate what lasting effects slavery and racism may have had on *white* culture. Jefferson worried that mastership inculcated among whites a domineering personality, a penchant for resorting to violence to settle every dispute. D'Souza belittles the long history of white violence against blacks (after all, he observes, only an "infinitesimal fraction" of the black population was lynched) without assessing the "civilizational" standards of people who brought their children to witness blacks burned alive in carnivals of hatred. As black congressman Robert Elliott asked during Reconstruction, commenting on the depredations of the Ku Klux Klan, "Who is the barbarian here?"

D'Souza borrows factual information from scholarly works while ignoring the authors' overall arguments. He cites Edmund Morgan on the development of colonial slavery without confronting Morgan's insight that the evolution of American democracy was fundamentally tied to the exclusion of blacks from the body politic and that, contrary to D'Souza's account, Jeffersonian liberalism, slavery, and racism coexisted quite happily for many decades. He quotes my own work on the era of Reconstruction, but does not seem to fathom that the freedpeople's record of working hard, striving to educate themselves and their children, and establishing stable families refutes his idea that they carried out of slavery a culture unprepared for the responsibilities of freedom. He utilizes William H. McNeil's writ-

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ings on world history, but D'Souza's effort to demonstrate the superiority of the West to all other civilizations repudiates McNeil's lifetime of scholarship.

Indeed, D'Souza's foray into world history, a tirade against what he considers distortions of the subject caused by multiculturalism, is among the book's more embarrassing sections. Without real understanding of current historical debates, he simply reasserts the ideas that Columbus was the discoverer of America, Indians were savages, and that all one needs to know about Aztecs is that they practiced human sacrifice. American children should study other cultures, he believes, but only as "horrible examples" of barbarism and injustice.

Like many self-proclaimed defenders of "Western superiority," D'Souza fails to notice that "the West," as he uses the term, is as much an invention as the Africa imagined by the Afrocentric scholars he deprecates. D'Souza's Western tradition is rational, liberal, and scientific. It includes the Enlightenment but not the Inquisition, John Locke but not the Holocaust, Charles Darwin but not the Salem witch trials (or, presumably, the legions of creationists at the grass roots of modern conservatism).

No more satisfactory is D'Souza's portrait of contemporary black society and politics, ostensibly the main focus of his book. D'Souza acknowledges that many blacks have moved into the middle class (although he never offers a breakdown by income or occupation of black Americans). But he insists that the values and behavior of the "underclass" shape the "cultural norms" of all blacks, with their "vicious, self-defeating, and repellent underside." The evidence, as in his first book, consists of anecdotes and sound bites, not careful social analysis. How do we know that black culture is hostile to education? Because of a few newspaper articles about students who resent those who study hard (not unlike the contempt for "grinds" when I was in high school). D'Souza writes that among poor black women it is a "common practice" to exchange sex for drugs. This may well happen among members of the drug subculture, but it is hardly "common" among poor black women in general, and D'Souza offers no evidence whatsoever for his assertion. Black culture lionizes criminal behavior, a residue of slavery, when the "bad nigger" was admired in the black community. True, blacks tend to view the police and criminal justice system more skeptically than other Americans, a "rational response," to use D'Souza's language, to their historical experience. But, contrary to D'Souza, the loudest calls for stricter law enforcement today emanate from crime-plagued black neighborhoods themselves.

Nowhere does D'Souza consider the effects of deindustrialization on black job prospects, the decline in the real value of the minimum wage, and other mundane matters that might have some bearing on the plight of poor blacks. Moreover, while crime, illegitimacy, and the like are serious problems in some sections of black America, many of these "pathologies" are on the rise among whites as well. Blacks may rely excessively on government handouts, but on this basis, defense contractors, farmers, real estate developers, and others also suffer from "civilizational" deficiencies. D'Souza acknowledges that drug use and illegitimacy are growing among whites; he blames this on—you guessed it—cultural relativism. But such behavior, he adds, is more destructive among the poor than the well-to-do, since rich heroin users have access to expensive treatment programs not available to crack addicts on the street. (Of course, the reader might conclude from this that the government ought to offer more effective drug treatment to blacks.)

As history and social analysis, *The End of Racism* cannot be taken seriously. It does, however, raise some interesting questions about modern conservatism, and about the American Enterprise Institute, which nurtured the book and has done its best to promote it. Conservatives nowadays are fond of decrying the decline of intellectual and stylistic standards, caused allegedly by liberal academics. But here is a book whose writing is pedestrian (it abounds with language like "racism requires biological inferiorization"), command of facts shaky, and arguments often incoherent. What has happened to standards at the AEI, or, for that matter, editing at the Free Press?

The End of Racism typifies what happens

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when one examines social problems from the cozy confines of a think tank, with no evident sense of real life and real people. D'Souza has no empathy for the millions of black Americans struggling against difficult odds to carve out better lives for their families. He condemns black scholars who write about underclass violence in "a tone of moral neutrality," yet he deploys the language of superiority and inferiority heedless of its effects on readers, and presents the most retrograde theories of pseudoscience (such as J. P. Rushton's linking of black brain and penis size, or Jans Eyseneck's "explanation" of black intellectual deficiencies based on the selection of slaves by traders for their physical strength) as "provocative," or "flamboyant," not insulting, reprehensible, or simply wrong. He calls, at the end of the book, for a renewed sense of morality and community, but his "public ethic of responsibility" does not include responsibility for less fortunate citizens, other than to let them sink or swim according to their "civilizational" abilities. The role of government is not to offer day care or job training—that would be paternalistic—but to outlaw antisocial behavior such as childbearing by welfare mothers. While wishing to remove the state from regulating the economy or interfering with private discrimination, D'Souza would have it intervene in the most intimate details of private life, a common contradiction in conservative thought nowadays.

In the end, D'Souza makes one wonder about the soul of modern conservatism. In principle, there is no reason why this country cannot produce a coherent conservative outlook free from the taint of racial bigotry. Yet time and again, conservatives have found appeals to prejudice irresistible. Is this because the ideas of states' rights and local autonomy are so closely tied in our history to the defense of slavery and segregation, or because the federal government despised by free marketeers has been so powerful an instrument for challenging racial inequality? Perhaps it is simply the lure of the cheap vote. Conservatives may in the future, as in the past, ride to power by stigmatizing black America as degraded, immoral, and "civilizationally" inferior. But at what cost to American society? □

Robert Heilbroner

WHAT FRANCIS FUKUYAMA CAN TEACH . . . AND LEARN

THE END OF HISTORY AND THE LAST MAN, by Francis Fukuyama. 1992. Avon, $12.50.

TRUST: THE SOCIAL VIRTUES AND THE CREATION OF PROSPERITY, by Francis Fukuyama. The Free Press, 1995. 457 pp., $25.00.

Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History* predictably earned him a skeptical response when it appeared a few years ago, especially from critics on the left, many of whom, one suspects, had not read the book. (There are some notable exceptions, such as Perry Anderson's "The Ends of History," a brilliant treatment, at once critical and admiring, in *A Zone of Engagement.*) Our daily exposure to Yugoslavian chaos, Russian anarchy, Chinese instability, African decay, and not least, United States retrogression offered ample reason to jeer at what seemed to be the smug conservatism of his title. Having myself harbored similar sentiments at the time (and for the same reason), I would like to begin this consideration of that infamous book, and of *Trust*, its newly published successor, by examining what they actually say. For I believe that Fukuyama has something of value to teach the left, not the least part of which is the necessity to discover what the left may be able to teach him.

The thesis that underlies these books is nothing less than an effort to discover the meaning of human history, which is to say, the core of significance behind the tragedies, disappointments, and occasional successes that assail us daily in the newspapers or that we find retrospectively in the great narratives of Thucydides, Gibbon, and the like. Lest this only deepen our suspicion of Fukuyama's work, it may be helpful to recall that many of us have begun from, or still harbor, such an ambitious overview of history as the gradual movement from the alienating and exploitative life of a class-stratified society to the emancipated existence of a democratic socialist one. This derives, of course, from Marx's view, celebrated in his much quoted description of a communist society as one in which

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one could "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner . . . without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic."

There is no need to criticize this famous flight of fancy, which stands in sharp contrast to the meaning of history that informs Fukuyama's work. Fukuyama treats Marx with all due respect, but he finds his own inspiration in Marx's own source, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. This is a view of history not merely as a vehicle for emancipation from oppression, but as a process by which humanity gradually becomes aware of a deeper need. In Fukuyama's paraphrase of Hegel:

> Men seek not just material comfort, but respect or recognition, and they believe that they are worthy of respect because they possess a certain value or dignity. A psychology, or a political science, that did not take into account man's desire for recognition, and his infrequent but very pronounced willingness to act at all times contrary to even the strongest natural instinct, would misunderstand something very important about human behavior.

Fukuyama employs the Greek term *thymos*—roughly *dignity* or *self-respect*—for this crucial need. *Thymos* plays a central role for him, as it does for Hegel (who does not, however, use its Greek name), because the transcendent importance of dignity leads both to ascribe to political liberty a primary place in the development of complete human beings, ultimately more important for their self-realization even than the satisfaction of "natural"—that is, material—wants. It goes without saying that this stress on *thymos* also serves to separate Hegel and his followers from Marx, who assuredly valued human self-respect, but rather too easily assumed that political liberty would naturally follow economic emancipation.

It is here, however, that Fukuyama himself departs sharply from a mere restatement of Hegel's views. Specifically, for Hegel, the mechanism for the historical transformation of personhood has a heroic, even mystical quality—"The individual, who has not risked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a person; but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness." With Fukuyama, the development of full personhood has a much more matter-of-fact character. We find it set forth in the opening chapters of *The End of History*, where he identifies the transformative Mechanism (with a capital "M") as the growing embrace of natural science, with its enlargement of material abundance. This is a far cry from Hegel's heroic awakening, but it is equally—perhaps much more—effective. Fukuyama writes: "Apart from fast-disappearing tribes in the jungles of Brazil or Papua New Guinea, there is not a single branch of mankind that has not been touched by the Mechanism, and which has not become linked to the rest of mankind through the universal economic nexus of modern consumerism."

As this passage makes clear, the historic process for Fukuyama is driven primarily by much less inspiring means than is the case with Hegel, but there is, nonetheless, a specifically Hegelian emphasis in Fukuyama's treatment. This is the importance of the idea of freedom. With Hegel this idea is finally instantiated in a state governed by an upper class that protects and values the *thymos* of its citizenry. In Fukuyama the historic process leads to the recognition that democratic institutions are the only possible template for the political life of an advanced society. However much reality may depart from this ideal, the ideal itself is now everywhere acknowledged. "That is to say," Fukuyama writes, "for a very large part of the world, there is now no ideology with pretensions to universality that is in a position to challenge liberal democracy, and no universal principle of legitimacy other than the sovereignty of the people."

Finally, capitalism completes the picture as the economic expression of liberalism. Fukuyama defines capitalism pragmatically, with emphasis on the relative strengths of the public and private sectors: "It is evident," he writes, "that there are many possible interpretations of this rather broad definition of economic liberalism, ranging from the United States of Ronald Reagan and the Britain of Margaret Thatcher to the social democracies of Scandinavia and the relatively statist regimes in Mexico and India. All contemporary capitalist states have large public sectors, while most socialist states have permitted a degree of private economic activity . . . Rather than try to set a precise percentage, it is

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probably more useful to look at what attitude the state takes *in principle* to the legitimacy of private property and enterprise."

As we shall see, this seemingly uncritical approach to capitalism ultimately leads Fukuyama into serious difficulties. But it is enough for the moment to complete the argument. A triad of science, political liberalism, and capitalism constitutes the elements of a social order that qualifies as the End of History. In the author's words:

> It is not the mark of provincialism but of cosmopolitanism to recognize that there has emerged in the last few centuries something like a true global culture, centering around technologically driven economic growth and the capitalist social relations necessary to produce and sustain it. Societies which have sought to prevent this unification, from Tokugawa Japan and the Sublime Porte, to the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, Burma, and Iran have managed to fight rearguard actions that have lasted only for a generation or two. Those who were not defeated by superior military technology were seduced by the glittering material world that modern natural science has created. While not every country is capable of becoming a consumer society in the near future, there is hardly a society in the world that does not embrace the goal itself.

Not very long ago such a thesis would have been laughed out of court, or at the very least asked to take its place in line behind socialism. I need hardly add that these views have changed as a consequence of the disasters in the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba. As a result, one can see why Fukuyama's claim deserves to be taken seriously. Science, liberal democracy, and capitalism do in fact constitute an uncontested center of gravity for institutional design in our day, and in the foreseeable future. To repeat, Fukuyama is not blind to the presence of fundamentalist beliefs, dictatorial governments, and anticapitalist mentalities. His point, rather, is that the force of science, the political frame of liberal democracy, and the energizing impetus of capital accumulation and competition have today become ideas beyond which it is very difficult—Fukuyama might even say impossible—to think. As we will see, I am doubtful that the triad, as it is defined in Fukuyama's book, constitutes an end to history, but I think he is right that it has created a resting point that may endure for a considerable while.

Having paid my tribute, I must state my reservations. The first concerns an issue whose centrality for Fukuyama I have only indicated in passing. It is the importance of *thymos* as an indispensable requirement for any envisioned "end of history." Fukuyama's commitment to *thymos* is passionate, which does not prevent him from a keen awareness of its potential for conversion into *megalothymos*, or the desire for collective recognition that leads easily to nationalism or ethnic aggressions. In the same reflective vein, he admits that it is uncertain whether the inequality associated with capitalism may not pose a serious threat to the attainment of a society of mutual recognition, as critics on the left would maintain; while also giving ear to the fears of the right that any such hoped-for equality may simply founder before the reality of human differences.

Thus Fukuyama offers hopes, but no assurances, with regard to the attainment of *thymos* in the liberal capitalist setting he favors. To me that candor, itself very typical of this bold but modest thinker, only strengthens his central placement of political and psychological concerns as the underlying requirement for a durable and workable historical model. But there is also something here that critics can teach Fukuyama. It is that his depiction of *thymos* smacks too much of an adult struggle for virtue and rationality. Dignity may well be a necessary condition for a good society, but the character and intensity of that need—not to mention the ease with which it is turned into racial and other intolerances—does not reflect only the spiritual strengths and weaknesses of mature individuals. Rather, it mirrors the fact that, like all behavior, *thymos* is formed in the gauntlet through which all must pass—the long and painful passage through childhood into early adolescence. If it lies within our capabilities to create a good society—by no means an assumption to be easily granted—the lesson-books will have to be those that help us strengthen the psyches of infants and children; and the teachers to whom we must turn not the dramatists of the adult spirit, but the explorers of the infantile imagination—not Hegel or

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Kojève or Nietzsche, but Sigmund Freud.

There is none of this in Fukuyama's book. Indeed, there is an amusing indication of its absence: in the extensive index to *The End of History* there is one entry for Freud, but when we turn to the indicated page, his name does not appear there (nor on any other page). Neither is any work of Freud's, or of other students of the unconscious, cited in the long list of sources. In a word, whatever we know about the process of personality formation is left out in a book in which personhood is given center stage.

A second criticism is much more predictable. It is the inadequate treatment of the dynamism of capitalism. To be sure, capitalism is described as deeply and by no means always constructively transformative, but somehow this recognition is never fully realized. Instead, capitalism appears as an essentially static framework within which disruptive developments, such as trends toward automation and globalization, appear but are never linked to the momentums and hungers of a social order dependent on ceaseless accumulation. In similar fashion, even when Fukuyama acknowledges the relation of capitalism's dynamism to the question of *thymos*, his treatment lacks vitality. For example, in assessing its negative effects he writes:

> The possibility of strong community life is also attacked by the pressures of the capitalist marketplace. Liberal economic principles provide no support for traditional communities; quite the contrary, they tend to atomize and separate people . . . [L]ives and social connections are more unstable, because the dynamics of capitalist economies means constant shifts in the location and nature of production and therefore work . . . . The sense of identity provided by regionalism and localism diminishes, and people find themselves retreating into the microscopic world of their families which they carry around with them from place to place like lawn furniture.

This is a strong presentation of the economic pressures of a market system on community life. Yet, where are the impacts of falling real wages, of disappearing employments, of the stupefaction of relentless advertising on the capacity to cultivate one's own dignity, much less to respect that of others? Perhaps more telling, the passage occurs a mere fourteen pages before the book's conclusion, in which the gravest danger to the End of History is seen as the *political* uncertainty as to "what constitutes man and his specific dignity." Thus, unaccountably, Fukuyama acknowledges but then forgets the role of capitalism as a powerful agency in forming man's conception of his self. Having given lip service to the possibility that capitalism may well undermine the attainment of a society of mutual concern and respect, in the end Fukuyama allows himself to be carried away by a conception of that ultimate desideratum as a process determined by high moral and political considerations, to the neglect of lower, but perhaps more powerful, psychological and economic ones.

This brings me to Fukuyama's second book, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, which he describes as an economic sequel to his first. To his credit I should add that it bears little resemblance to the abstract economics we learn in the standard textbooks. "Economics," he tells us on the first page, "is grounded in social life and cannot be understood separately from the larger question of how modern societies organize themselves." This leads Fukuyama into an analysis of the social relationship that constitutes the title of his book—a relationship that clearly has its roots in *thymos*, although that key word no longer appears in the text, perhaps because the sociologist Max Weber now becomes more of a tutelary figure than Hegel. Trust is vital to the success of capitalism, Fukuyama explains, because it constitutes the ultimate basis of its productive capabilities. In conventional economics, success *is* attributed to the vast structure of capital that the system accumulates, together with the immense division of labor that this makes possible. In Fukuyama's economics, the secret lies in the growth of "social capital"—the ability of people to work together—and this social capital, in turn, derives from the capability of individuals to share norms, to respect the dignity of others, and to join hands in common goals—in short, from the system's capacity to generate trust.

As a consequence, we find a spectrum of capitalisms whose varying performances reflect, more than anything else, the levels of social capital they can generate. Economies in which there

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is a high degree of mutual regard develop smooth management-labor relations, flexible and adaptive work teams, and highly effective networks of suppliers; countries that lack this capability do not. Fukuyama cites modern-day Japan and Germany, and the United States in its nineteenth-century heyday, as examples of high trust societies; and (Southern) Italy, France, and China as examples of the opposite.

The bulk of *Trust* consists of an analysis, part historical, part contemporary, of both ends of the spectrum. Rich in examples and argument, it will amply repay study, but I will not attempt to summarize this portion of the book here. For my own main interest, and I imagine that of most readers of this essay, concerns the connections that Fukuyama finds between trust and the institutions and dynamics of contemporary capitalism.

As we must have divined from his earlier treatment of capitalism and the development of *thymos*, Fukuyama is ambivalent in his assessment. On the positive side, he argues convincingly that capitalism initially breaks down the barriers of kinship orders, the suspicions characteristic of peasant communities, and the rigidities of precapitalist command societies. All these social formations are obviously inimical to the development of a climate of generalized trust. Thus the market serves at first as a great social force for redirecting the search for dignity away from acts of valor or violence to those of material attainment, while at the same time encouraging the development of informal associations of capitalists and, to a lesser extent, of workers.

Fukuyama is not, however, a simplist in this belief. "[T]he larger theme of this book," he writes, "is that sociability does not simply emerge spontaneously once the state retreats. The ability to cooperate socially is dependent on prior habits, traditions, and norms, which themselves serve to structure the market." Capitalisms thus inherit varying degrees of precapitalist propensities to form relatively more or less trusting societies. Not surprisingly, here Fukuyama mentions Tocqueville's amazement at the network of civil associations he saw in America, so different from the French system of carefully determined place and privilege. Fukuyama is quick to note, however, that although initial social givens are important, these capabilities can change over time. Indeed, he notes that Tocqueville himself feared that the individualistic basis of American gregariousness could easily become an egotism that would "[dispose] each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows."

How is this tension between individualism as a force for and against trust resolved? In Fukuyama's view, there are powerful tendencies in both directions. On the one hand, the expanding exercise of economic activities gradually changes the motivation of its participants from a drive for power to the milder purpose of expressing their roles, of finding their place in society. In a word, acquisitiveness loses its combativeness and becomes the more matter-of-fact, although no less important, expression of one's *thymos*, one's dignity. Wealth is thereby "spiritualized"—not perhaps the most fortunate term, but one that dramatizes the point Fukuyama wants to make with regard to capitalism as a source of increased mutual respect.

On the other hand, Fukuyama recognizes that individualism also destroys trust. We have already seen his recognition of the fact that the inner dynamic of capitalism reduces individuals to "a microscopic world" of family relations. This brings me once again to note the incompleteness with which Fukuyama assesses the economic system that he has made one of the legs of his triadic end of history—in this case, his unwillingness to consider the degree to which the dog-eat-dog necessities for survival in the marketplace can coexist with the trusting patterns of live-and-let-live. It is surely to the point, as Fukuyama himself points out, that the highly trust-directed relationships of Japanese capitalism, with its lifetime employment, have been seriously challenged by its recession of 1992-3, while the frail *ententes* of American labor-management relations have been ruthlessly discarded under the pressures of ever more fierce world competition.

Fukuyama remains distanced before this contest of forces. So, too, with the fact that the favorable influences of capitalism seem to be associated with its initial appearance, and the unfavorable effects with its later development—a matter that is mentioned but never pursued. Even more important is his treatment of another eco-

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nomic development that, were it fully examined, could seriously, perhaps even fatally, challenge his fundamental vision. In the background of both his books Fukuyama perceives the growing presence of a vaguely defined, but unmistakably real entity called the World Economy—an entity that begins to surround and overshadow even such powerful national economies as our own, much as ours surrounds and overshadows the state economies of Illinois and California and New York.

Here the question that remains unasked is whether this emerging supranational aspect of capitalism does not call into question the plausibility of an end of history posited on the triad of science, democratic government, and capitalism. Surely the last two of these constitutive forces depend on strong and stable national entities within which to exert their social influence. But if the world economy continues its self-generated growth, the consequences for both democratic politics and capitalist economics are likely to be disastrous. What will be left of the relevance of liberal political structures for an end of history if the world economy makes ever more irrelevant the boundaries of the nation-state—massive ecological effects and unmanageable immigration pressures as examples? What is left of the relevance of capitalist national economies if their real-world counterparts are increasingly defenseless against economic penetration, to the point at which they can no longer even exercise effective control over so fundamental a means of self-regulation as the quantity of money within their national control? The world economy, in a word, is an entity whose sole unifying attribute is a commitment to an economic system that erodes the longevity of its presently constituted members. The self-consuming aspects of such an institutional framework seem ill-suited to serve as the setting for Fukuyama's vision.

These prospects are still distant, save for the already manifest pressures of international finance and migration. Nonetheless, the contradictions of a world economy of capitalisms suggest that at some imaginable time in the future another set of institutional structures may become necessary to create a durable setting for humanity's journey. Perhaps wishfully, I can imagine one in which each of the three legs of Fukuyama's design have been changed in significant fashion. In place of science guided to an important degree by economic and military incentives, I could picture it guided by the need to protect the fragile ecosphere against further deterioration. In place of political structures concerned with the rights of individuals within their national boundaries, I could picture the addition of transnational rights—the protection of immigrants as a case in point, the outlawing of international exploitation as a second.

And in lieu of our present range of capitalisms, I could even see a range of "socialisms" that sought to combine the flexibility of markets and the protection of individual property with safeguards against the many negative side-effects of markets and the asocial consequences of both the absence of property among the lower portion of the population and its excessive possession among the topmost portion. Some such an amended triad might form the basis of an End of History better suited to cope with the problems generated by its present supposed terminus. I should add, however, that I suspect even such a much-hoped-for future will be not so much an end to human history as another resting place. □

Jerry Watts

CULTURE AND ICONS

REFLECTING BLACK: AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURAL CRITICISM, by Michael Eric Dyson. University of Minnesota Press, 1993. 384 pp., $19.95.

MAKING MALCOLM: THE MYTH AND MEANING OF MALCOLM X, by Michael Eric Dyson. Oxford University Press, 1995. 248 pp., $19.95.

It was not long ago that very few readers had heard of Michael Eric Dyson. However, during the past five years Dyson has been an intellectual whirlwind. His writings have appeared in many national journals, he has published two books, appeared on *Oprah*, testified before Congress, and delivered many, many lectures both

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in this country and abroad. Articles in the *New Yorker*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the *Atlantic Monthly* have called him one of our nation's most prominent public intellectuals.

But one has not been exposed to the Michael Dyson experience until one has heard him speak. His rhetorical flourishes have left many audiences gasping, for Dyson is able to integrate the polysyllabic vernacular of academic philosophy with the cadences of black urban speech. At his best, Dyson harnesses his verbal mastery in engaging discussions. From the reports of others, Dyson at his worst can appear to be more fluff than substance. (I, for one, have rarely seen Dyson when he wasn't in top form.)

Reflecting Black: African-American Cultural Criticism, Dyson's first book, is a collection of previously published essays. They are primarily journalistic and impressionistic forays into contemporary black life and culture, covering topics from rap music to the cultural significance of the *Cosby Show* to the commodification of Michael Jordan's body; from Leonard Jeffries, the reigning charlatan of African-American parochialism at New York's City College, to the 2 Live Crew pornography trial.

The utter boundlessness of the subject matter informs us that it a young author's book. Even for the experienced writer, essay collections are notoriously difficult to coordinate. Unfortunately Dyson seems to have taken anything and everything he has written and thrown it together. Needless to say, the center does not hold. The best essays here are quite dynamic, the worst are forced efforts at profundity. Others are just elaborate restatements of received wisdom. Because of the diversity and disjointedness of these essays, the collection is difficult to review.

Dyson offers an intriguing overview of rap music. For him rap is significant because it captures the sensibility of urban black youth attempting to navigate a social structure that excludes them. Rap is therefore both an affirmation of black urban life and a scream about its dead-end possibilities. As Dyson notes, there are severe tensions within rap music between those rappers with political visions and those who are simply interested in providing entertainment. Some rap artists crudely celebrate violence while others offer humane condemnations of it. Much of rap is decidedly sexist, if not misogynistic. Yet rap cannot be ignored, for it contains creative forms of Afro-American opposition and accommodation.

In an interview republished here, Dyson makes further claims about rap that border on overstatement. He labels rap star KRS-One's "edutainment" (the merger of entertainment and education) "a noteworthy and salutary achievement." I beg to disagree. I went to hear one of these edutainment lecture/performances at my college and was shocked at how much of what KRS-One had to say was utterly superficial and wrong.

Dyson further states, "Rap music is a profoundly oral culture that exhibits the quest for literacy that has impelled the Afro-American community forward." If anything, rap may have *hindered* the quest for literacy among many members of our younger generation. But Dyson outdoes himself when he argues for the significance of MC Hammer's dance record "Pray." Dyson argues that Hammer's record and video bring the message of the church "into a secular arena with the powerful motifs that are common to the church, and yet they transcend the narrow, sanctuary-bound messages that don't reach a wider populace." So a rapper's admonition to pray while he sings and gyrates his hips is important because it leads listeners to piety. Come now, Mike. Might our good man Hammer not better embody the gospel by spending his money on something other than race horses and huge mansions in Atlanta?

What does rap mean to intellectuals like Dyson? Is it possible that academics celebrate rap in order to feel vicariously connected with the plight of the black urban poor? Might this identification with the music substitute for authentic political engagement? My hunch is that a sector of the black intelligentsia (including Dyson, Cornel West, Henry Louis Gates, Tricia Rose, and Houston Baker) have concertedly assumed responsibility for defending the creative validity of rap music in the face of its devaluation by mainstream white society and cultural institutions. In effect, instead of being native informers, Dyson et al. might be considered the natives' promoters. Jokes aside, the celebration of rap by intellectuals like Dyson gives them a way to enter into dialogue with their less fortunate

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urban peers. Hopefully, this cultural entrée can be harnessed to generate a broader dialogue between hip-hop and traditional intellectual communities. Yet, this can only occur if those traditional intellectuals who celebrate rap can overcome their feelings of ethnic illegitimacy and defensiveness when engaging and confronting black rappers. Till then, traditional intellectuals who write about rap may continue to use it as another badge of their "otherness" within the academy.

I raise the question of the traditional black intellectual's relationship to rap because I don't perceive the profundity of the music. I have no problem with calling rap an urban popular art form that simultaneously entertains and affirms marginal black lives. But as far as I am concerned, rap is merely this generation's equivalent of Little Richard, James Brown, and Carla Thomas, with one major difference: rap has a more pernicious hold on the minds of today's urban youth than rhythm and blues had on us thirty years ago. This stems in part from the image of rap as thoughtful and even "deep." Where does this come from? Simply put, even rap groups with political intentions (for example, Public Enemy) are not politically sophisticated. One can enter into a more informed political discussion at any neighborhood barber shop. I do not need to listen to rap to hear the latest versions of various conspiracy theories about the secretly planned destruction of black men.

Dyson's discussion of Spike Lee's movie *Do the Right Thing* is quite illuminating. Like many reviewers he sees this movie as a heroic attempt to depict the tragic way that racism affects black life. Even so, Dyson believes that the movie fails as social commentary. He argues that Lee is caught in a cul-de-sac resulting from divergent ambitions—"to present the breadth of black humanity while proclaiming a black neo-nationalistic aesthetic." Dyson is critical of Lee's inability to create characters who are more than symbols: Lee's characters often lack complexity and instead are caricatures of pre-determined racial roles.

From my vantage point, the pivotal scene in *Do The Right Thing* takes place when Sal, the Italian-American pizza shop owner, fights with a local black male, Radio Raheem. The police arrive and Raheem is "accidentally" killed. In retaliation for his murder, Mookie, a black male who works for Sal, throws a trash can through the pizza shop window. A fire is lit and the shop is consumed by flames. I read *Do the Right Thing* as a crude neoconservative farce in blackface. In the movie, the black urban dwellers are by and large shiftless jokesters who have little more to do than "hang out." Raheem, the victim of police brutality, is a brain-dead brute who plays the same record over and over on his boom box. The only character with a political vision has a feeble if not farcical one, which centers around putting black people's portraits on the wall of the pizzeria in place of the Italian-American icons that Sal displays. Raheem's death is not tragic, it is pathetic. There are no heroic qualities to any of the black folks to make this a tragedy. The burning of Sal's pizzeria is a feeble act of crowd mayhem. (Why, for instance, wasn't the anger of the black mob directed at the police instead of Sal? After all, it was the police who killed Raheem.) Had a white director or producer created *Do the Right Thing*, Dyson would have been up in arms claiming racism. If this be the new black cinema, then bring back *Shaft*!

Besides his frivolous commentary on the mediocre musical score to a banal and easily forgotten film, *Mo' Money*, the only truly vacuous essay in the Dyson collection is a discussion of Michael Jackson's postmodern spirituality. Like too many other writers, Dyson assumes that the mere association of the label postmodern with things black miraculously upgrades the cultural status of the black phenomena. In this way, Jackson's apparent shallowness becomes a sign of his hidden depth. His weirdness embodies a universal representativeness. Dyson calls him a "Promethean allperson." Choreographed performances become moments of spontaneous joy. Dyson states that "central to Jackson's career is an abiding spiritual and religious consciousness that is expressed in his body of work as a performer." Perhaps Dyson is referring to Jackson's abiding commitment to accumulating pieces of green paper with the inscription "In God We Trust." As if this were insufficient, Dyson proceeds to drown Jackson in cultural studies hy-

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perbole:

> Jackson's performances richly fuse Bakhtinian conceptions of carnival with Afro-American forms of spiritual ecstasy, producing a highly animated hybrid that creates space for cultural resistance and religious agency.

Cultural resistance—embodied in Michael Jackson?

We live in an age of cultural inflation, but then we always have. Grandiose claims of cultural influence always abound when any new group of intellectuals and artists begins to push into the mainstream. Like previous generations of ethnic intellectuals on the verge of entering center stage, the black intellectuals of today come bearing the fruits of their devalued culture. Such first generations to "break through" are often incapable of being honestly critical of the artistic productions of their ethnic peers. They can either unfairly condemn their fellow ethnic artists/intellectuals, defending the existing standards as "universal." (Often such universalists are seeking individual acceptance from those in cultural authority.) Or they can celebrate every nuance of folk culture. Perhaps an instructive example of this phenomenon would be the differences within the emerging postwar Jewish intelligentsia between a highbrow literary critic like Harry Levin of Harvard and a celebrator of Yiddish literature like Irving Howe. Dyson has chosen to defend the emerging creative productivity of black Americans. But the problem is that he attempts to offer creative discussions about materials that are often not very rich in meaning. It is like quoting from Hegel to illuminate the buttoning of one's shirt.

Dyson is a critic whose worldview has been dominated by the influence of the electronic media. Although he claims he is commenting on the impact of these cultural media, he is in fact their prisoner. His commentaries on Michael Jackson, Michael Jordan, and Bill Cosby are essentially commentaries on their media-created personae. The main criterion that Dyson employs to evaluate these figures is merely their popularity. He claims that the "moonwalk" dance performed by Jackson before fifty million viewers (on Motown's twenty-fifth anniversary show) elevated the performer from musical superstar to a "world historical figure." Cosby is "a formidable national icon . . . a powerful symbol of the graceful confluence of talent, wealth, and industry that are the American Dream."

Dyson's second book, *Making Malcolm: the Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X,* is significantly better than his first. He begins with a short reflection on an encounter he had with black male students in his class at Brown who challenged him on his right to run a seminar on Malcolm. The students were angry at the fact that Dyson not only criticized Malcolm but did so in front of white students. Worse, he was directing a seminar in which even white female students had the nerve to criticize Malcolm. Evidently, these black male students viewed Malcolm as their ethnic/class/gender icon and no one, including the black male professor, was supposed to criticize him. Dyson was hurt and angered by their attempts to monopolize "Malcolm." The idea of Malcolm had been absorbed within various personal identities. The tale is quite telling, for it exposes the depth to which the myth of Malcolm has saturated some black male minds—even Dyson's.

The best part of *Making Malcolm* is an extended review of the literature on Malcolm X. The discussion is excellent and could serve as a road map for any novice student of Malcolm trying to weave through the literature.

In Chapter 4, "Malcolm's Shadow: Masculinity and the Ghetto in Black Film," Dyson surveys the images of black manhood in some of the most popular recent "black" films. In the portrayal of black ghetto life in movies like *Juice, Straight Out of Brooklyn* and *Boyz N the Hood,* Dyson sees an image of black maleness that he believes has as its focal point the idealization of Malcolm X. Dyson believes that the prevailing image of Malcolm as the model black man is saturated in sexism and macho bravado, and states that "without the sustained hero worship of Malcolm X, contemporary black cinema . . . is almost inconceivable." Perhaps he is correct, but he has to do more to establish this linkage than merely assert a correlation between the sexism and bravado of Malcolm and the sexism and bravado of black male film directors. Still, this is an aside. Whether the linkage exists or not, we do know that the values pro-

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jected in such films are often quite frightening. To his credit, Dyson has written a provocative discussion of these movies. Whether or not we have Malcolm to thank for this state of affairs is beside the point.

In some crucial respects Dyson does not succeed in rescuing the historical Malcolm from the myth of Malcolm. He may be closer to a celebratory mode than he would like to admit. More precisely, though he criticizes the sexism of Malcolm, he doesn't seem to realize how much Malcolm's appeal depends on his sexism. One cannot say, "If only Malcolm weren't sexist," for it is in part his sexism and his rejection of all femininity that makes him such a "heroic" black male figure. In fact, there is very interesting material for an analysis of Malcolm as myth that Dyson simply overlooks. The image of Malcolm as "our manhood" speaks to the deeply held needs of the Afro-American community and particularly the Afro-American male community. If Malcolm was "our manhood," what does this say about the majority of black men who in no way were as public or vociferous in denouncing American racism as Malcolm? In other words, does not the invocation of Malcolm as the quintessential black male speak to a sense of unacknowledged weakness in the black community?

A major absence in *Making Malcolm* is any discussion of Louis Farrakhan. After all, it is Farrakhan who most conspicuously appropriates the stylistic mantle of Malcolm. It is therefore no accident that despite Farrakhan's endorsement of Malcolm's murder (and possible implication in it), he is viewed by many blacks as a direct descendant of Malcolm. This is particularly true among many of those black males most deeply invested in hip-hop. And why not? Like Malcolm, he is a master of strident denunciations of white America. Like Malcolm, he is an avid black nationalist. I am aware that to designate Farrakhan as Malcolm's direct descendent will be considered ethnically sacrilegious to some blacks. But herein lies the problem that Dyson conspicuously avoids. For most of his political life, Malcolm was the advocate of an anti-intellectual, cult-like movement that had as its basic philosophy a neo-Booker T. Washington celebration of petty capitalist enterprises (dry cleaners and small restaurants). Like Washington, the Nation of Islam abdicated a critical political engagement with a racist status quo in behalf of "self-improvement" and moral uplift. Are we to ignore the larger part of Malcolm's political life?

One of the ironies of the legacy of Malcolm is the way his reactionary social vision becomes whitewashed and emerges in the Reagan era as proto-revolutionary. For the greater part of his political life, Malcolm was an insular black nationalist, and worse, a black supremacist (à la the myth of Yacub and the morally superior black person). As Dyson correctly argues, black nationalism thrives during moments of intense white racism (and thus will probably be on the scene as long as there is a United States). The Malcolm that is reconstituted in the 1990s has a split identity. For the urban black youth, the Malcolm that is being recuperated is the parochial Malcolm, the Malcolm who was a spokesperson for the Nation of Islam. White progressives and black intellectuals like Dyson have in mind another Malcolm, who rejected crude nationalism for a more cosmopolitan vision. I am often left speechless by their attempt to define Malcolm's recognition of the humanity of white folks as a crucial moment for all Afro-American people.

Dyson recognizes but does not discuss that aside from his membership in the Nation of Islam, Malcolm's politics were decidedly rhetorical. Dyson celebrates the rhetorical, even going as far as to argue that the thousands of black sermons delivered every Sunday constitute a tradition of "rhetorical resistance that has been prominently featured throughout black cultural history." Undoubtedly, much of my disagreement with Dyson about the significance of Malcolm stems from the fact that Malcolm is a hero to Dyson whereas I don't think of him as a significant political thinker.

Michael Dyson is a work in progress. He is an intellectual instigator, one who starts the tension but leaves before the rumble. As such, his significance depends in large measure on the vibrancy of the intellectual community that surrounds him. One can only hope that he will find an intellectual community that provides him with both affirmation *and* criticism. In many respects,

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he will rise to the level of his intellectual ambitions. I must confess to a degree of pessimism. On national television a few days before the Million Man March, Dyson claimed that it was a march *against* sexism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism. His capacity for glib apologetics casts doubt on his political and moral seriousness. Those of us who learn from this dynamic young voice can only hope that academic ambitions and the lure of fame do not derail him from realizing his considerable talents. Dyson must contend. The choice is his. □

George Packer

THE POOR AND US

IF YOU CAME THIS WAY: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE LIVES OF THE UNDERCLASS, by Peter Davis. John Wiley & Sons, 1995. 202 pp., $22.95.

THE WAR AGAINST THE POOR: THE UNDERCLASS AND ANTIPOVERTY POLICY, by Herbert J. Gans. Basic Books, 1995. 195 pp., $22.

Two years ago I came to know a forty-year-old woman living in a housing project in a decayed industrial city north of Boston. When I met Lois, she had just lost her job at Head Start after her car was stolen, and was collecting unemployment insurance, though she hadn't applied for the disability benefits to which she was probably entitled because of her extreme obesity, which required her to use crutches. A local mall had rejected her application for a position as Santa during the Christmas holiday. She was all for welfare reform and making the poor work. A son was heading toward criminality; her daughter, nearly as obese as she, was graduating from high school with honors and a deficient education. Lois's weight squeezed her features into a narrow-eyed look of apparent ignorance and meanness, but she was smart and utterly decent. She had been raped by her father and beaten by her husband, she was often depressed, her project apartment was in shambles, and sometimes she smelled bad. She also led the project's tenants council and was active in a regional coalition of community groups. But she complained that the middle-class suburbanites in the coalition neglected her and the tenants council, never came to visit, never delivered help. I asked another coalition member, a teacher at a local college, about Lois's isolation in the group. An ally and friend of hers, he replied: "Maybe it has something to do with Lois being so fat."

It seemed a brutal thing to say, but I immediately realized that it was true. What most middle-class people feel toward the poor is a degree of pity along with fear, revulsion, even hatred. There's no point in charging this attitude with classism or any other offense, which would only drive it underground. You can't shame people out of such feelings. To humanize the poor and undo their current status in America as social outcasts, even enemies—the shared purpose of these two very different books—you have to start by admitting that it's easier to talk about them than to deal with them or enter their lives. Once you've acknowledged your real feelings, you can begin the harder work of finding out what the poor are really like, and what they and you might even have in common.

Herbert J. Gans, the Columbia University sociologist, has written a learned and humane account of how the poor in America came to be stigmatized and made pariahs in the decades after the War on Poverty had its brief heyday. Gans's main argument is that the term *underclass*, coined by Gunnar Myrdal in 1963 to define "an unprivileged class of unemployed, unemployables and underemployed who are more and more hopelessly set apart from the nation at large and do not share in its life, its ambitions and its achievements," soon lost its economic connotations and became a journalistic and scholarly "label" for the destructive behavior of the poor. Instead of describing entrenched structural poverty, which was Myrdal's original intent, *underclass* came to mean what was meant in the nineteenth century by the *undeserving poor*.

Gans takes pains to trace the course of this label into the 1990s, with the implication that a different name would cast less blame for their misery on the poor themselves. It isn't clear that a more "objective" term (as *underclass* itself once seemed) could somehow remain neutral in the war against the poor; but Gans shows convinc-

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ingly that the trend away from structural and toward behavioral explanations of poverty has been helped by a label that turns the persistently poor into an alien caste and allows the rest of us to blame them for sins we may well fear and despise in ourselves. At one point he says that "the old dichotomy in which the Right blames the poor and the Left blames society is dubious even when it appears in more complicated guises," and yet the whole burden of this book is to highlight the dichotomy and begin shifting the blame off the poor back toward society.

To that end, Gans sometimes falls into the trap of defending what isn't defensible. Illegitimacy, for example (he doesn't specify among whom), becomes "culturally divergent behavior," and "insisting on the harmfulness of divergent behavior is a way of asserting the cultural and political power of one's own values, and thus concurrently of blaming the diverse for asking for their place in the cultural sun." This cascade of jargon falls on and conceals the teenage girls turned into "property" by gangster boyfriends, the babies born addicted to cocaine (40 percent, according to Peter Davis, of all babies born in the worst parts of Chicago), the children neglected or tormented by overwhelmed mothers and left to fight the dog for food in overcrowded, filthy apartments. Whether illegitimacy is an effect of poverty or a cause or, most likely, both, it is not "culturally divergent behavior." Gans's euphemisms are every bit as effective as the word *underclass* in turning the poor into abstractions so that they can become what we want them to be. Asking his readers to accept as morally and socially neutral pregnant fifteen-year-olds who will never be able to support their children is asking them to stop thinking about the poor altogether.

The dichotomy between economic and behavioral explanations *is* sterile and false, because it ignores the way behavior further victimizes the victim. Poverty means being faced with impossible choices or none at all, and being driven by hopelessness to do destructive things. It's no help pretending that the destruction isn't happening or isn't destruction. Having to choose between saying the poor are blameless and eliminating federal support for them will always end in the latter. That shouldn't be the choice in the first place, but the left is just as prone as the right to false dichotomies, which is one reason the right has been winning the war against the poor.

Gans ends with a series of proposals for combating poverty by a policy of "massive job creation, the encouragement of a labor-intensive economy, taxing the machines and their owners, the separation of work from income, drastic work sharing, as well as . . . offsets to reductions in the standard of living." To say they won't happen any time soon doesn't mean these proposals aren't worthwhile. It's clear that only radical measures will change a situation in which we limp along tolerating forty million officially poor Americans—a chronic ache, symptomatic of some degenerative disease, that we spend a great deal of energy trying to ignore.

Peter Davis's *If You Came This Way* (the title, incongruously, comes from Eliot's *Four Quartets*) stands as an antidote to the euphemizing effect of Gans's reasonable analysis. Davis, a journalist and documentary filmmaker, doesn't shy away from the word *underclass*. He believes there is an identifiable class of Americans—as many as twelve or fifteen million—who "have fallen out of the bottom and do not meaningfully participate in the economy of the United States." Several years ago a member of this class mugged Davis outside his New York apartment building. The choice confronting a man who remained a liberal into his fifties was to forget it happened, to become a conservative, or "to find . . . the kind of person who had mugged me."

Davis set out on a journey in search of the underclass that took him to Oakland, Los Angeles, San Antonio, Chicago, and Bangor, Maine; and the resulting story has the quality of a pilgrim's progress through Hell, self-mortification and self-exposure to the worst streets that America has to offer. It's as if the distance between the underclass and us is so great that the only way to close it is a deliberate headlong plunge. During his journey Davis sometimes feels afraid and repelled, as well as ashamed, moved, angry, and numbed out—emotions that will occur in anyone who takes the trouble to look.

He ducks into homeless shelters and starts

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conversations with guests. He gets a partial life story from an L.A. streetwalker who initially takes him for a customer. He tries to discuss Head Start with truant boys playing cards in a Chicago alley until one of them demands, "Hey, Mister, watchoo want?" At times Davis's quest seems maddeningly naive, as when two white cops pull him over in Chicago's South Side, where Davis has been wandering around for hours, and tell him, "You're in a combat zone; civilian casualties are high . . . Lot worse than 'Nam . . . Places we saw you going we wouldn't go and we're armed." At other times, especially in the early going, his ruminations take on the random banality of a man walking around an alien neighborhood and feeling as if he's discovered something new.

But Davis has the essential virtues of persistence and candor, and the benefits of these far outweigh his occasionally awkward intrusions on his own story. Because he isn't afraid to appear foolish, he sees and hears much more than a more circumspect or less tenacious inquirer would. In his use of the word *underclass*, the reality of the poor becomes more, not less, complex and sympathetic. The signal feature of underclass life, besides poverty, is despair, which makes drug use, dropping out, illegitimacy, and other pathologies comprehensible as the actions of sentient human beings who may not be as different from you or me as we would like to think, only more hopeless. The teeth are blackened, but the voice is distinctly human. In their articulateness, their self-inflicted damage, and their vulnerability, many of the people he meets remind me of Lois, the woman I got to know two years ago. "Look, the poor aren't who you think they are," a woman in Bangor named Adriana Saint Duclos Mathere tells Davis. "They may want what you want and not be able to get it, you know that? . . . Do you have any idea how difficult it is for the very poor, like me, to find a job—*and* to keep it? Why should this be so?"

These encounters make sobering reading for anyone who supposes that either welfare reform or a jobs program could end this kind of poverty. The individual poor are caught in stickier webs than most middle-class people can imagine. "They don't work because they can't," Davis writes. "They can't find work and can't do it if they do find it. No single catchall program is ever going to scoop them all up and convert them into employable citizens." A few of his subjects, like an ambitious young mother of three in Chicago who tells Davis, "You teach *your* kids possibilities. *I* teach *mine* to be scared," struggle up with the help of social service agencies to a tenuous fingerhold on the working class. Most of them—the Maine street kid nicknamed Psycho whose father once imprisoned him in a well for nine days, or the prostitute who gave up her second coke-addicted baby after selling her first to her dealer, or the man and woman in an L.A. shelter who once worked steadily and now, in their forties, "have no hopes"—are at best surviving, more likely deteriorating with the help of drugs and falling farther and farther out of what Herbert J. Gans calls the "mainstream." Even Ted Stokes, Davis's personable, diligent guide to Chicago's Cabrini-Green project and "a member of the occasionally employed poor who teeters on the brink of the underclass," doesn't have the skills or the driver's license to raise himself beyond a makeshift existence in a city hemorrhaging jobs. For these people to succeed in the slenderest sense of getting and keeping a $7 an hour job would require a coincidence of their own and the world's cooperation that would be, in the circumstances of their lives, all but miraculous.

Davis's conclusion, which criticizes both the Republican war on the poor and an exhausted liberal agenda, looks to business for intervention in the hard-core areas. Given the way Ameri-

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can companies are treating their middle-class employees, something more skeptical than his cautious hopefulness seems required toward a corporate solution to entrenched inequality. Here Gans is more persuasive: he recognizes that millions of economically perilous Americans are perched "only a generation" away from the underclass, while Davis, who gets so much closer to the poor, mainly feels their terrible objective difference from him. But his brave and foolish wanderings and his earnest self-questioning yield insights into the moral relation of the poor to the rest of us that stay with you: "They are our enemies, and they know it even if we don't. . . . No one is without vulnerability, and the weak remind the strong of theirs. It is so easy to persecute in the underclass the tendencies we fear in ourselves: idleness, susceptibility to drugs and alcohol, surrender to immediate gratification, all the chaotic pleasures of undiscipline. . . . Nothing over the centuries has been so unremittingly urged upon the poor as the virtue of hardship by those who will not have to endure it."

These hard-won aphorisms apply the pressure where it belongs. They don't bury human destruction and self-destruction under a mound of jargon, or explain it all as a result of structural defects in the economy. They don't even tell you not to judge. But they oblige you to imagine what it's like to be poor and to consider how the poor see you. That, at least, is a beginning. □

Recent and Forthcoming Books by *Dissent* Editors

Paul Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968*, Norton, 1996.

Mitchell Cohen (co-editor with Nicole Fermon), *Princeton Readings in Political Thought*, Princeton University Press, 1996.

Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars*, Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 1995.

Robert Heilbroner, *Visions of the Future: The Distant Past, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Deborah Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons to America from a Small School in Harlem*, Beacon Press, 1995.

Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, Norton, 1995.

Michael Walzer (co-editor with David Miller), *Pluralism, Justice, and Equality*, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Sean Wilentz, editor, *David Walker's "Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World,"* Hill & Wang, 1995.

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In Memoriam

Emanuel Geltman 1914-1995

We mourn the loss of Emanuel Geltman, one of our founding editors, who died on September 6. "Manny" was a socialist for longer than most of us have lived. As a teenager, influenced by his radical older brothers and sister, he joined a young Communist group. By the time he entered Brooklyn College he had come to question the Communist accommodation with Hitler, and he joined the embryonic American Trotskyist movement. Soon he was a leading member of the youth group. Along with James P. Cannon and Max Shachtman, founders of American Trotskyism, and youth leader Nathan Gould, he attended the Paris meeting that resulted in the Fourth International in 1937. Manny used to joke that he joined movements just in time to leave them. Never one to follow a "party line," he broke with the Trotskyist Socialist Workers party and went with the Shachtman group that had been disgusted by the Hitler-Stalin pact and the Soviet invasions of the Baltic countries. Before he was drafted, Manny edited Labor Action, *the Shachtmanite group's weekly paper and served as an organizer on the West Coast. In the post-World War II era the limits of sectarian politics became clearer, and in 1953 he left the Shachtmanites and joined Irving Howe, Stanley Plastrik, Lewis Coser, and Meyer Schapiro, among others, in founding a journal that, Howe and Coser wrote, would "provide a rallying point for those who dissent from the bleak atmosphere of conformism that pervades the political and intellectual life of the United States."*

Manny worked as an editor for the Quadrangle Press, the University of Chicago Press, and elsewhere. He was the first managing editor of Dissent. *At his memorial service, Brian Morton and Michael Walzer, men of two different generations influenced by Manny, spoke of Manny's contributions to the magazine and to the socialist project. We print their talks below.* —EDS.

When I first came to work at *Dissent*, Mark Levinson told me a little about the different people who worked at the magazine. When he got to Manny, he said, "You'll like Manny. Manny'll make you feel at home." Then he smiled and said, "Manny loves to talk."

He was right. Manny did make me feel at home—within a month of my coming there Manny and Frances had me over for the first of many dinners. And Manny did love to talk. Every office has its recurring scenes, and one of the recurring scenes at *Dissent* involved the give-and-take between Manny and Simone Plastrik. Someone might mention Meyer Schapiro, and Manny would say, "Did I ever tell you the story about the time Meyer and Irving and Norman Mailer got stuck in an elevator for half an hour, and Meyer made the time go by by giving them a lecture on French impressionism?" Manny would go on to give a paraphrase of Meyer's lecture, slightly abridged, and in the middle of all this Simone, the taskmaster, would look up and say, "Brian! Manny! No talk! Work!" And the two of us would be quiet for a while, because we were both afraid of Simone.

But the flow of conversation never stopped

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for long, and I was grateful for that. For one thing, it was a pleasure to listen to Manny—he had a great sense of humor, he'd read everything, and he'd known everyone. But after a while I realized that Manny wasn't talking just to entertain. I realized that when Manny talked to me or any of the younger people who came to work at *Dissent*, his talk had a very serious purpose. He was giving us an education. Manny was teaching us about the history of *Dissent*, and the history of the American left in the twentieth century. He was a good teacher. When he told you about the people he'd known, you felt as if you'd known them; when he told you about some of the political battles he took part in, you felt as if you'd taken part in them too.

Manny's stories were rarely about himself. Most of them were about Irving, Stanley, Simone, Meyer, Joe Clark, Joe Carter—the people he'd worked with, the people he loved. Choosing to be a socialist doesn't seem like a formula for a lifetime of gratification, but listening to Manny's stories it was clear that his choice had brought him nothing but joy—because it was a choice of comrades; because he worked every day with people he loved and people who loved him.

It wasn't only through talk that Manny gave you an education. You learned a lot from Manny by watching him work. Manny was a superb editor. Part of what made him such a good editor was a matter of temperament or character. He was completely unjaded. Reading unsolicited manuscripts, for example, is usually considered a chore, and Manny could easily have handed the job off to someone else, but he never did. He enjoyed reading the things that came in over the transom, because he loved to discover new writers. Even when he turned a piece down, he'd send the writer a long and serious letter about it. I received one of those letters myself about two years before I came to work for *Dissent*. Usually a rejection letter brings you down, but this one made me feel eager to keep writing.

During the years I knew him Manny wasn't doing much writing under his own name, but he was doing a lot of writing behind the scenes. He was a good editor with all the writers he worked with, but he was a miracle worker with the tough cases—the writers who had something worthwhile to say but not much idea of how to say it. (*Dissent* has had a few of those.) If the finished pieces had a certain elegance, that was because it had been supplied by Manny.

In the days since he died, I've kept hearing Manny's voice. It happened, for example, yesterday afternoon at *Dissent*, when I read a manuscript by a writer who was promising but not quite ready, and I was trying to write a rejection

Emanual Geltman Photo by Chalmers K. Stuart

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letter that would somehow make the writer feel encouraged and eager to try again . . . .

I'm glad that I keep hearing Manny's voice, and I'm not at all surprised that I do. Manny was never one to leave in the middle of a conversation. I miss him very much, but I think I'm going to be talking with him for the rest of my life.

BRIAN MORTON

A Dissenter's Dissenter

You all know the phrase "a ballplayer's ballplayer," which describes someone whose qualities are best appreciated by people in the game. Manny was a socialist's socialist, a dissenter's dissenter. Only people close to the magazine can even begin to understand the importance of the part he played over many years. If you have written for *Dissent* but are not part of the inner circle, you probably don't know or can't acknowledge how much of your best prose . . . was Manny's.

"One of the oldtimers"—that's the way I thought of him when I first met him: he would have been in his early forties. Like the other oldtimers and unlike them: less prickly; less eager for a polemical exchange; more inclined, within our own ranks, to make peace; ready with a joke, a story, a reminiscence whenever an argument got a little rough. In *A Margin of Hope*, Irving Howe describes a factional fight, sometime in the late 1930s, when a Greek comrade chased Manny with a knife—because Manny had called him an Albanian. I can hardly imagine him using the more standard sectarian epithets (though he surely did): once *Dissent* was under way, he learned to make his points without them.

I saw him mostly at meetings, where I sometimes thought he talked too much. I wish now we had recorded every word (or sent someone to do an oral history; we thought there was time . . .). In the movement, among the Trotskyists, there was a style of argument, of *extended* argument, which would start with the division of labor in ancient Babylonia in order to reach and analyze the latest strike in Detroit or Akron. When Manny and Stanley Plastrik and Irving gave that up, Manny replaced it with something else, with an inner-*Dissent* history of the argument. He was always ready to tell us who first wrote about this or that issue, and who objected, and why, and who responded to the objection, and how. And I, who rarely spoke at board meetings unless Irving kicked me, took a while to recognize the value of all that: it was our collective life, edited (and probably revised) and kept alive in Manny's head.

Stanley, and Manny, and Irving: they came out of an older politics together and (with Lew Coser, whose political history was different) they made the magazine and kept it going. They had come through a certain political experience, and though they would disagree afterward about this or that, they were never really at odds; they were as one . . . and Manny the last of them. We always felt sure about him; when something needed doing, when there was a particularly difficult article to edit, an outraged friend who needed to be placated, some complex arrangement to be delicately negotiated, he was certain to be ready. Something had been settled back then among the three of them, and there was a firmness and steadiness ever after. They had left behind a sectarian orthodoxy; their politics henceforth was open, experimental, attuned to change; and yet they were socialist rocks, "standing fast in good times and bad"—as Irving said of Stanley—"on call for whatever task was needed, living by a code, largely unspoken yet not to be violated, of concern for the lives of men and women." That describes the three of them . . . and Manny the last.

Perhaps it is appropriate that he should have been the last, for he remembered everything and told us about it. Now that he is gone, we will have to tell the stories ourselves: who first wrote about that issue in the magazine, and who objected to what was written, and why . . . . And now Manny is part of the story.

MICHAEL WALZER □

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What Is an American?

Editors:

Although I have no answer to the profoundly difficult and persistent question Michael Lind raises in his article, "Are We a Nation?" (Summer 1995), the conclusion to which he comes raises several concerns. Lind cuts to the fallacies of multiculturalists and democratic universalists, but remains surprisingly vague on the subject of his own solution, "Trans-America." Trans-America, we are told, is the leftist political Eden the United States could become if and only if vernacular culture is rightfully recognized as the true backbone of American nationalism. Lind takes for granted the existence of such a pervasive, encompassing vernacular culture and merely hints that "it has more to do with family, neighborhood, customs, and historical memories than with constitutions or political philosophies." I beg to differ.

In a nation where nearly all of the inhabitants are immigrants from various parts of the world, the ideas and practices of families are never entirely the same. Even within the same diasporic community, families can be radically different as parents and children struggle to choose between customs of the old world and elements of assimilation in the new. The perpetual influx of immigrants bringing disparate opinions and interpretations of world events moreover shatters any solidarity of historical memory. Lind dismisses this disunity by arguing that those who do not master the American idiom are not as "American" as those who can, but in many cases recent immigrants prove to be the most patriotic, though perhaps not deft at weaving "tongue in cheek" into daily speech.

Vernacular culture should not be a yardstick by which to measure our American identity; it shifts from region to region, class to class, parent to child. And besides, it seems a tad far-fetched to consider someone more American than my mother by virtue of their intimacy with all the meaningful possibilities of the words "cool" or "funky."

America is more than a loose clutter of separate peoples. I am investing my college education in the belief that there exists a certain strand of unique American experience that binds together this nation. Perhaps that strand is our mutual recognition of each other as misfits from other, distant lands. (It is a familiar story that we feel most like Americans in our ancestral homelands.) Perhaps it is our tacit pact with our uncommon neighbors to live and let live. Frankly, I don't know. I respect Michael Lind's attempt to conquer the question of American nationalist identity and thank him for entertaining my comments.

WENDY WU
Wilmette, Ill. □

Too Much Credit to *New Criterion*

Editors:

George Scialabba's generally judicious article on the *New Criterion* (Fall 1995) grants too much credibility to that journal's political tirades, which farcically belie its posturing about upholding Arnoldian critical standards. What can one say about a journal with this stance whose media critic, James Bowman, says of Rush Limbaugh that "it would be difficult to find many people on the radio more civil"?

I surmise that Scialabba was not being ironic in stating that "Kramer and Kimball would sooner die than fake a fact or twist a quote." They might not deliberately fake facts, but the *New Criterion* is undoubtedly the most sloppily edited intellectual journal extant, each issue being loaded with factual errors. For example, Kramer's and Kimball's report on a panel titled "Teaching the Political Conflicts," over which I presided at the 1994 Modern Language Association convention, must have set a record for most errors in five paragraphs, including identifying literary critic Richard Ohmann as an "economist," calling the organization "The Modern Language Society," and saying that the session was on teaching literature rather than rhetoric and composition.

As for twisting quotes, this is Kimball's main claim to excellence. In a piece trashing literary theorist Fredric Jameson, Kimball tried to make Jameson into a comsymp by saying he "speaks of Maoism as the 'richest of all the great new ideologies of the '60s.'" However, Kimball de-

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leted Jameson's next sentence in the essay cited: "One understands, of course, why left militants here and abroad, fatigued by Maoist dogmatisms, must have heaved a collective sigh of relief when the Chinese in turn consigned 'Maoism' itself to the dustbin of history."

Scialabba should be wary of concluding that the *New Criterion* is "on the whole . . . right" in the culture wars when that "Arnoldian" journal and its allies seem able to make their case only by distorting leftists' positions beyond recognition.

DONALD LAZERE
Oakland, Calif.

Multicultural Education in Perspective

Editors:

In his essay in the Fall 1995 issue, George Scialabba writes that efforts at multicultural education "have undoubtedly made possible some valuable work and attracted some people to culture who would otherwise have been lost to it. But they have also generated a really staggering amount of mediocre and tendentious work." He believes that multicultural education has done more harm than good.

It takes a long time to separate the wheat from the chaff, especially in matters of culture and the development of reason. It was over 150 years before the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture in this country offered up a mature literature. A lot of dross fell by the wayside before the emergence of Whitman, Dickinson, Melville, and Twain. Kant, writing on freedom, said "[O]ne cannot arrive at the maturity for freedom without having already acquired it. One must be free to learn how to make use of one's powers freely and usefully. The first attempts will surely be brutal and will lead to a state of affairs more painful and dangerous than the former condition, under the dominance, but also the protection, of an external authority. However, one can achieve reason only through one's own experiences, and one must be free to undertake them."

Multicultural education is, at least in part, an attempt to grant some freedom to minority voices in the culture. More than criticizing its shortcomings, we should be encouraging its growth.

MICHAEL LAWTON
Bethlehem, Pa. □

To Letter Writers

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The Last Page

Two and a half years as book editor at the Muppets opened my eyes: we live in the age of the licensed image. Before my sensitization, I admit I'd never reflected on the "source" of, say, the Mickey Mouse watch or Star Trek pajamas. Yet think about it—where does that stuff come from? At Mups, I found out. It came from down the hall, from the character licensing department.

Here's how it works: a Muppets account manager grants an exclusive license to Colgate (or Procter & Gamble or Butler) for Miss Piggy toothbrushes. The Muppet art department either designs the appropriate Piggy toothbrush imagery or reviews Colgate's art. Colgate manufactures the toothbrushes, markets them, and turns over a chunk of the profits to the Muppets.

So it goes all over the land, from Lion King mugs to Liz Taylor's latest scent. The Rolling Stones 1995 Voodoo Lounge tour generated over $250 million in ticket sales, but official Voodoo merchandise brought in over $315 million. Remember last summer's United We Stand America convention? It boasted a Ross Perot Gift Shop. And consider O. J. Simpson. Word has it that he plans to trademark his name. In prison during the long murder trial, he worked up a list of 120 products for licensing (stuffed toys and swimwear at the top of the roster). After all, he owes millions of dollars in legal fees.

Leftists should note in particular licensed merchandizing by not-for-profit organizations. Last year's Monet megashow at the Art Institute of Chicago opened along with a special museum boutique. The shop sold not only the predictable water-lily umbrellas and charm bracelets but also the first Monet mouse pad for computers. This kind of merchandizing is—sad to say—the most widespread response to Republican-style budgeting. The Chicago museum aimed to make $3 million off Monet "merch" in order to compensate for cuts in federal funding.

Merch knows no bounds. Today not even the public sector escapes. Remember the Mounties—the Royal Canadian Mounted Police with their broad-brimmed tan hats and high-collared red jackets? Their name conjures up mountain vistas, the rush of icy streams, the smell of pines. Surely there's merch here.

The Mounties think so. They've granted an exclusive contract to license their image to the Walt Disney Company. The news created a Canadian stir. Some people worried that Disney would turn the venerable Mounties into cartoons. But many more citizens protested the contract going to a U.S.-owned business. The Mounties count as Canadian cultural property; the contract should have gone to a Canadian company.

The Mounties' public relations people justified their decision. Disney with its vast experience would provide top-notch service; the Mounties would review all product designs (they planned a discreet entry into the market—mostly books and tee-shirts, no cartoons); Disney would subcontract manufacturing rights to Canadian businesses (thus nationals would produce the B.V.D.s and tees); and the Mounties would get 50 percent of all profits. (Fifty percent strikes me as a crackerjack deal from Disney. An editor in their book division once warned me, "Be prepared for our contract. We'll ask you to sign over everything, including your first born.")

The Mounties finally mollified critics of their decision to go commercial with a promise: they would use some of the licensing profits to fund community policing, which has suffered serious cuts in the government's budget.

Ah, now we see the broad implications of image licensing in the private sector. The market will solve the fiscal crisis of the state. Commodify and prosper. Better tee-shirts than taxes. Let justice trickle down from Mounty totes to tots. What would Karl Marx say? J. M. Keynes? And what would we hear from George Orwell?

JOANNE BARKAN□

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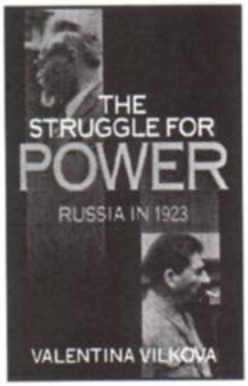

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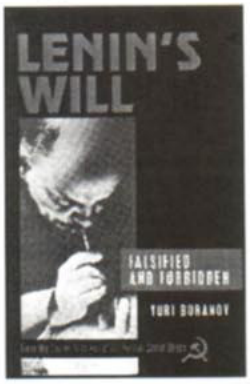

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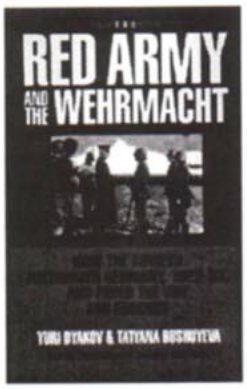

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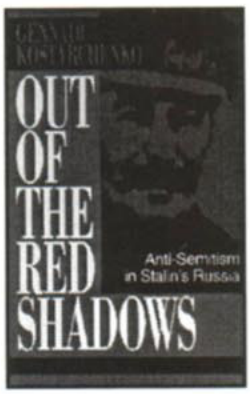

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